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SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.



SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

A Story.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1867.

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250. o. 257.

LONDON :
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

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BOOK THE FIRST.

SIR JOHN DIGBY (*continued*).

SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW OWNER OF DIGBY.

SIR JOHN had been carried to his resting-place with all the pomp of squirearchal show—with the gentry in carriages and the tenantry, in a reckless display of scarfs, walking behind. One or two of the old servants, who had almost a morbid delight in such pageants, professed themselves more than satisfied with what had been done. The epitaph in everyone's mouth was, that he was "the last of the old stock"—a panegyric meant to imply condemnation of his successors—those London fashionable Digbys, who had come down to take possession, and who were, of course, heirs-at-law, as *no will had been found*. Sir John's

solicitor had, indeed, announced confidently that there *was* such, that he had prepared it, and that, as of course, young Mr. Severne "came in;" but when he was told, with many "shakings of the head," of the quarrel on the day before Sir John's death and of the sudden expulsion of the young man, he saw at once how the matter stood, and wrote off at once to the new Sir Perkins Digby, than whom no one was more surprised at his own good fortune.

Sir Perkins, a dry and excellent public officer, had a salaried appointment in some Board; had been a working barrister, and from his labours on a commission had been made "C.B." He was a thorough "office man," and looked on all country life as a sort of barbarism, and on country gentlemen as more or less uncivilised. His views, calmly expressed and enforced with much clever reasoning and official fluency, had excited the bitter animosity of his kinsman, who had often said that "no clerk or quill-driver should ever turn Digby into a counting-house." And the result was the carefully-prepared document

“drawn” under the advice of counsel, and which was so hastily cut up by the angry Sir John, in presence of Mrs. Lepell.

All desks, private places, &c., had been thoroughly ransacked; but the will which the solicitor had prepared could not be found. Sir John was a very “orderly man;” every paper was in its place; the solicitor even knew the private spot where the will should lie. But, instead, there was only found the great blue legal envelope, labelled outside in Sir John’s own writing, “MY WILL.” As this was empty, it was clear he had destroyed it.

The lady and her husband had not yet gone when the new Sir Perkins came down. He arrived as if about to sit on a commission and make a report. He came, already in a deep black suit—though he had been telegraphed for, and had not time to order mourning, and yet it was a suit that shone and glistened as if newly come from the tailor’s. Within ten minutes he had been “over the house,” and had taken note of everything and of everybody. Within half an hour he

had heard all particulars, and had everything in order in his own mind—with a list of witnesses to be examined—again just as if he had come down on a commission, and had to send in a report. From the first moment his eye had settled on Mrs. Lepell, with whom the late baronet, it was known, had talked a great deal on the day of his death, with whom, it was known, he had dined, and with whom he had sat up a long time.

To her, then, came an early message, by one of the maids, that "*Sir Perkins*' compliments, and he would be obliged if she would step down for a moment to the study." She saw a middle-aged gentleman, very tall and pale, and with pale, straw-like whiskers.

"Take a chair, Mrs. Lepell," he said. "I hope you are not hurrying away, at least with any inconvenience to yourself. There is plenty of time—plenty of time; and you must not think yourself the least in the way."

She acknowledged these civilities very gratefully; but said they had really fixed to go that evening.

Sir Perkins then proceeded to dwell with conventional regret on the loss of his relative, whom, he said, was one of the excellent old school, now so rare, and so fast dying out of the country. "Happily" so fast, was what our intelligent Lady read off in his expression.

"I, of course, did not know him so well" ("not at all," she interpreted this speech); "for our paths lay in quite different grooves. In fact, I believe he had intended, through some little prejudices, wholly unreasonable, I must say, now, against me, to make a different disposition of his estates to what he has done. Fortunately a better and more Christian spirit prevailed."

Though Sir Perkins said this in narrative form, it seemed to take the shape of an interrogation. But Mrs. Lepell agreed with him ardently, and only said—

"Oh, sir, he was *the best* of men!"

"Of course, of course," said Sir Perkins. "But you saw a good deal of him before his death? Of course, at dinner and meal-times, every one else having left the place, he must have

been thrown in a good deal upon your company, and, of course, quite naturally, spoke out all his feelings? I am told, Mrs. Lepell, that you were a special favourite of his?"

Naturally she was a little discomposed by this allusion. After all that had passed—all *that scene* of the night before—no woman but must have been affected.

"He was only too partial to me," she said. "His heart was in its right place, Sir Perkins. Those old trees—to have cut one of them down was, I believe, to have taken away his heart's blood. And quite naturally; he was reared among them from his childhood."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Sir Perkins, impatiently; "that is all very well. But surely, you, a person of more than ordinary intelligence, must know that after a quarrel such as took place between him and his relation, he would scarcely be thinking of trees and his place; he would have been excited, ma'am; he would have been full of but one subject, and could talk of nothing else. I know the world pretty well by

this time, and have travelled over plenty of minds in my day. I have sat on many a commission, and know what must take place under given circumstances pretty well—oh, indeed, yes.”

Sir Perkins, in fact, had talked himself into very complacent satisfaction with his own gifts.

There was a curious look in her eye—half amused, half mischievous—which his knowledge of human nature did not help him to see. He was, in fact, looking at the ceiling and smiling.

“Yes,” he went on, “I can almost hear you and him talking, and can give you the very words almost. Sir John, most naturally displeased, said he must make an example of the person who had chosen to offend him, and take his own course ; that as the tree fell so it must lie, and all that ; that whatever he *had* intended or had arranged he would alter, or *had* altered now—eh, Mrs. Lepell ?” And with some anxiety Sir Perkins looked at her, and waited for an answer.

She only said—

“How wonderful you are, Sir Perkins. What use such a gift must be to you in the world.”

Sir Perkins crossed his legs impatiently.

"Surely you can't be *so slow*," he said, testily. "You follow me, I know. I don't like moving in the dark here. You surely can recollect—being asked in this plain, unofficial way—what took place."

More mischief came into Mrs. Lepell's eyes.

"I shall never forget a word of it—of that dreadful day. Poor, poor Sir John!"

"Ah, come *now*," he said; "that is better. He, of course, stormed against that young man?"

"Yes, Sir Perkins," she said; "and, as I understand, declared again and again that he would what is called cut him off—yes, cut him off."

"Precisely," said Sir Perkins, pleased. "Nothing more natural; quite right."

"In this strain he spoke the whole day, coming in and out in great excitement. I tried all I could to soothe him—indeed I did—representing that matters were not quite so bad as he said."

"Oh!" said Sir Perkins, a little uneasily. "V *vi* did? Indeed?"

"*Indeed I did,*" she went on. "Then we dined together, and all during the dinner, Sir Perkins, I said all I could—you mustn't be angry with me, Sir Perkins—in favour of that poor young man. I showed him how unreasonable it was, on a sudden turn like *that*, to eject a poor boy without an hour's notice, and turn him out on the world. I did, indeed, Sir Perkins. I owed it to my conscience to use the opportunity."

"O, indeed, madam!" said Sir Perkins, stiffly, and yet more uneasily.

"But," said Mrs. Lepell, confidentially, "before he went to his room that night, I am glad to say that by my poor efforts I succeeded completely *in changing all his views, and had the happiness of bringing him completely round to an indulgent and more Christian view to his own relations.*"

"You did this, ma'am?" said Sir Perkins, starting up. "Then I think you—I mean—I don't quite understand—why, then, I suppose he may never have changed his mind at all?"

"How can I tell, Sir Perkins?" with a curious

air of slyness and innocence. "What opportunity could *I* have of knowing?"

"Oh, of course not," said Sir Perkins, hastily amending the false step he had made. "Besides, we have reason to know perfectly that he did destroy the will he had made. It is all quite right. It was seen only a few days before by his solicitor, and was then deposited in a certain place. It is gone now. It has been destroyed. Thank you very much for the assistance you have given me. I am sorry we can't have the pleasure of seeing more of you. But you will understand, under the circumstances——"

"Oh, I think I told you," answered Mrs. Lepell. "Our chaise has been ordered since this morning. We could not stay. By the way, I shall see Mr. Severne in town. I know I shall. I could say nothing to him from you, Sir Perkins? He will be anxious, of course, to know exactly how everything stands."

At this point Mr. Duncan entered to say that the carriage was ready. Sir Perkins was looking at her with great wonder and surprise, doubtful

whether he should put a question to her. But this sudden entrance disturbed him. He thought it was better to leave matters as they were. Then their trunks were brought down; and Mr. Lepell—not quite so well to-day—was assisted down tenderly by the anxious Mr. Duncan, who had said, reassuringly—

“Leave him *hall* to me, Mrs. Lepell, ma’am. Don’t distress yourself *pussionally* about it.”

Nothing could be more delicate than this gentleman’s last attentions. At a hurried interview in the hall, where a moment’s privacy was secured, Mrs. Lepell offered her little *honorarium*, though Mr. Lepell had himself “taken care of Duncan,” that gentleman—with a delicacy rare in his order—actually put it back, a little offended. Such art had this lady of conciliating the mysterious beings who wait on us in this world.

But here some one came. Once more that “low beast,” the coachman, as Mr. Duncan afterwards described with much reasonable indignation, “must go thrusting hisself in, a smellin’

of the steebles, enough to make a dog sick." Words which were reported by a meddler to that gentleman himself, who, in bold and blunt language, and with many strong oaths, talked of bunting up all the eyes in Mr. Duncan's head, only that the latter was too chicken-hearted to give him the chance—adding "that if he'd only step down to the stable, while Bill stood fair, *he'd* give him a lesson," &c. It was only the obvious indecency of such a step at such a season that prevented a meeting between the two gentlemen.

It seemed a sad and wonderful change for Mrs. Lepell as the carriage drove away down the avenue between the old trees. Crowds of incidents—new associations—had been fitted into those few days. But as the snow which had fast bound Sir John's ponds and his avenue, and charged the branches of his plantations, had now passed away and been dissolved, so were all the little prospects for life which she had so reasonably built upon that visit suddenly thawed away. Nothing can be conceived more *mal apropos* than

a cruel interruption of this sort. Most of us have found such, with the fairest opening for making pleasant friends, and finding pleasant company, vistas of future meetings, assistance, and co-operation spreading through years to come, suddenly all broken up by some sudden blow—the lights extinguished, the crowd dispersed. The accident which has opened such a pleasant prospect—that might have actually determined the whole of a future life—is no more than an accident, and will not recur again.

No doubt some such train of speculation was in our Mrs. Lepell's mind as she drove silently down the avenue, seated beside her husband, who was suffering, and silent also. Had she spoken she would have been cross or pettish, as was, indeed, not very unreasonable.

Digby—"dear old Digby," with its spreading demesne and fine wooding—looked very grand and magnificent as the trees closed in, and she was now going back to the prose of life.

END OF BOOK THE FIRST.

BOOK THE SECOND.

MR. SEVERNE.

CHAPTER I.

NUMBER SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

NUMBER Seventy-five Brooke Street was now occupied by the new family who had taken it on lease. It was a little thin strip of yellow front, with a dark-green hall-door, plate glass, and green-tiled flower-boxes in front. Persons passing by, also remarked a system of mirrors at the proper angle, outside the parlour, and which could scarcely be used for reflecting the flowers in the boxes. This house had been newly taken; and after having fallen for a long time into dirt and dilapidation, a "family" had come in and "done it up," and were "actually" now in residence.

The new maid, with sleeves drawn up, and standing at ease, with her broom at rest, pausing in her cleansing of the steps—being on terms of

intimacy with her neighbour next door—had her early morning's gossip—just as she had her morning's cup of tea—across the railing that separated the two hall-doors. She was a round, bright, brisk, industrious little creature, and laboured at her broom or towel, as if it was an oar.

"Yes, Mrs. Flinders," said Patty, which was the name of the bright-cheeked round maid, "they've come back at last—mister and missis. The poor gent, Mrs. Flinders, is quite broke down—and, indeed, I'm sorry for him. If you had seen him when they were here a week ago, as fine, and tall, and straight a gentleman as you'd see come up a steps. Like a noble lookin' sergeant, Mrs. Flinders."

Mrs. Flinders listening with fresh interest—at the introduction of this similitude—laid aside her broom, and leant on her elbows to hear better.

"Ah, now, dear me, *that* sort of man. Ah, I know." She had a sergeant before her mind at that moment, whose intimacy she had once enjoyed. But he had been false.

"Yes, indeed," went on the maid, warming, "a fine soldier-looking man—and there he came back all doubled up, and battered, and next to a cripple, and *no* voice, Mrs. Flinders, beyond a whisper that you couldn't hear from me to you. They were *in* the railway when it run off the line. It was all in the Sunday paper. So Mr. Waterhouse told me, who reads his through and through, every Sunday in the pantry, and reads beautiful too, better than many a parson."

"And she?" said Mrs. Flinders, with a nod at the windows.

Patty paused a moment; and having checked her torrent of words, said, with hesitation—

"O, she's very well, and all that, but—she's too sweet, Mrs. Flinders, by a good deal; and all the time goes peering, with her eyes here and her eyes there; and her voice is too cold for one of her years. Ah! his is as gentle as a lamb's."

"Then that will never answer," said Mrs. Flinders, decisively. She was a woman of experience. "I know her sort well—*well*, my dear

Coming down to count the scraps—where's this and where's that?—I know how *that* all ends. Ill-will and dishcomfort, and a whole treen of illconvenience to both parties—to one party and to the other," she added, as if the variation added new force to the sentiment. "It 'ill hold on for a month; but then it *must* give way."

"To be sure; there's Miss Helen, his daughter, gentle as any lamb—you wouldn't know she was in the house. Mr. Water'us was on the step, passing, and said she reminded him of Lady William Something. Ah, she's sweet indeed; and I can tell you, Mrs. Flinders, the *other* one don't like her, I can see. We may kiss and kiss again, Mrs. Flinders, but that don't mean everything."

"No more it does, my dear," Mrs. Flinders answered, beginning to enter into cordial animosity against the lady of the house. "And who was she at all, I'd like to know? What right has she?—a nursery governess, I dar'say, my dear. That's *their* profession—looking after the children and the lessons; and the master

comes in—‘ I hope the children are getting on.’ ‘ O yes, sir.’ And then there’s a blushing, and the master comes again—all to look after the children. You know, my dear, what that leads to. I have seen a bit of life, and I tell you that’s a regular p’fession.”

This was a new light for Patty, who was a fresh country girl, and had seen only a little town service. She had great independence of her own; but great respect for that knowledge which only actual acquaintance and experience of the world can give.

The baker’s gentleman now coming up with his morning’s supplies, interrupted this little domestic review; and in a moment both ladies had instinctively settled their caps, and were engaged in rallying their acquaintance with much gaiety and smartness. By this short conversation the reader will see that a daughter of Mr. Lepell’s by a former marriage made a third in the newly-taken house in Brooke Street; and though we all know pretty well that such an arrangement is in many instances highly incon-

the issue as you put it. Her mere presence can be no offence?"

"Dear me, no!" said Mrs. Lepell, putting back her bonnet and smoothing her hair, absently.

"Well, every one must love to be with her; if not, she will be with us always. Surely, never was there a sweeter disposition; and, as I said, if she brings with her into the house a single hour's annoyance, turn her out—upon the streets, if you will."

"Upon the streets!" said Mrs. Lepell, smiling. "How strange! There is no need to drive the poor child to such an extremity as that. All I was thinking of was your—*our* complete happiness!"

"I have made up my mind," he said, excitedly, "on *that*, at least. I cannot lose my little daughter. I cannot go so far as that—no, not for anyone. I am not called on to make such sacrifices; indeed, indeed, I am not, and cannot, and no influence shall get me to do it."

Mrs. Lepell sighed, and fell back with a sad

and resigned expression. She had unloosed the strings of her bonnet, for the carriage was a little "close."

There was a very fresh and bright young officer at the other end of the carriage, who was going on leave. He heard the sigh and some scraps of the discussion, and it almost seemed to him that she threw him a look appealing for sympathy. He was fortunate enough to escape "without a squeeze," as he well put it, in the collision, and gave a very happy account of his journey only the next day at mess.

"I was sitting here, you know, at this end, and they were at the other. He might have been her father, so he might—a regular grey boy, like the old colonel that called here to-day. I took her style at once, you know, the moment I got in. I know something of that sort of line; and when I offered my newspaper you should have seen how the old cock glared!"

"Bravo, Dick!" said an approving comrade. You're the lad!"

"I saw how the ground lay, at once," went on

Dick, encouraged. "A case of selling to the best bidder; and presently they began to spar, you know, and he to growl and turn savage. 'I'll not let him into my house,' said he. 'I won't have it.'"

"That was you, of course," said the sneerer of the party.

"I don't say that," said the other, "but I could see, you know, how the country lay; and then she kept giving me a look every now and again, as much as to say, 'I say, pity me—help me,' you know. I declare I was quite sorry for her; but it would hardly have done, you know, to interfere exactly—one couldn't well."

Mr. Dick said this irresolutely, as if in compunction at having not behaved very chivalrously in the matter; and his brethren, with grave faces, seemed to doubt whether, under the circumstances, they would not have interposed, supposing they had made similar advances in the favour of the lady. It was altogether a nice point, and was warmly debated up to midnight; and Mr. Dick, being largely rallied on his

"success," grew yet more mysterious in his communications—hinting that much more had passed that he could not well, in honour, disclose at a mixed society of that sort. This is the weak side of all gentlemen's society ; and who does not know how many imaginary conquests, equally unsubstantial with what Mr. Dick thus related to his friends, has vanity helped to effect? Mr. Dick's victory was based on those involuntary, piteous, and imploring looks which our Jenny—it was an unconscious habit of hers—threw on him.

Now, at Brooke Street, Mr. Lepell was ill and weak; and the matter could not be renewed. Besides, the daughter—a gentle, amiable girl—was making herself useful ; discharging a thousand tender offices, and watching over her father night and day. Affectionate daughter and still more affectionate wife ! he must have been a very happy father and husband.

In the course of the day during which Patty, the maid, and her acquaintance had had their conversation across the railing, arrived a dark brougham,

out of which a Doctor Pinkerton let himself briskly, posting up the steps with great speed. He was a sharp-eyed, wiry, narrow little man, who was in large practice, but of whom enthusiastic friends, warming into a spirit of prophecy, said eagerly, "Mark my words, you'll see him with a 'Sir' before his name yet"—a prediction that was never verified, though he lived to get into very large general practice. Pinkerton had been the nearest doctor, which was the reason he had been sent to. He had a smart, abrupt questioning manner, and air of distrust in his face, which, with those who did not know him well, stood rather in his way; and this, as it seemed likely to be "a long case," was the more unfortunate, for almost at the outset he had offended the lady of the house by his *brusquerie*. He had addressed all his directions to the daughter, utterly overlooking Mrs. Lepell.

"This is a very curious case," he said; "I hardly know what to make of it as yet, he seems so languishing. You must keep yourself up, my good sir. Don't give way, and we'll pull you *well*

through. Don't worry yourself, or let yourself be worried, or tire yourself talking."

Mrs. Lepell, keeping modestly behind the doctor, now came forward, and bent over her husband.

"Yes," she said, "and you feel better to-day, dear, I am sure, after this ? The pain is going, is it not ? You hear what this gentleman says—you are not to give way or lose your spirits, and you are *sure* to get well. Isn't it so, dear ?"

Mr. Lepell's eyes settled on her with a curious restlessness ; then turned away uneasily. The doctor looked at her from head to foot.

"See here," he said, turning to the gentle daughter, when they had got out, "don't let him be worried with questions—do you feel this and that, and are you not better ? There's no use in it, and it means nothing at all. In fact this—no one need be so eager about these things. *You* needn't in fact come in *at all* to him. We physicians are accustomed to see what a patient's whims are, and I can see pretty well here what his wishes are."

Mrs. Lepell drew herself up, and her eyes flashed.

"*I am his wife, sir!*" she said.

Pinkerton started a little.

"Mistake!" he said. "I beg your pardon; but still it can't be helped. I give my opinion plainly and bluntly, and can't be mincing matters. Of course there's a medium in all things, and I wouldn't exactly be *too* much with him."

The young girl had gone back to her father. The doctor and Mrs. Lepell were alone in the drawing-room.

"What a mistake!" he went on, smiling. "Shall I tell you frankly though how it came about? There was something in his manner to you, and in *your* manner *too*——"

Mrs. Lepell answered him coldly.

"There," she said, handing him his fee; "perhaps *now* you will understand who is lady of the house here. *That* prevents all mistakes."

"The most straightforward language I know," he said. "I think it will not be necessary for me to see him again until two or three days.

Though a leech professionally, I am not a horse one. Backhouse would come to you twice a day, and generously and with a noble self-denial put back the proffered fee at his second visit. Still, though he so nobly refuses, the patient is worth a guinea a day."

Mrs. Lepell smiled at this. Doctor Pinkerton told Mrs. Pinkerton at dinner that he did not like her smile, and that he was deuced sorry at that moment he had joked with her. But this view might have been prompted by what she said to him after she had smiled :—

"As for that, Doctor Pinkerton, we shall not give you the trouble of calling again. We have our own family physician, who is in town now, and who always attends us."

"Quite right," said Doctor Pinkerton, "and *very good too*. But you must take care that he is a first-rate man, and experienced——"

"Like Doctor Pinkerton," said she, smiling.
"Oh, I have no fears about him."

"Oh, of course," said he, a little confused.
"But what is his name? Who is he?"

She shook her head. "You are not to have *all* our secrets—good day."

"I don't believe a word of it," said the doctor, at dinner, to Mrs. Doctor; "it was one of her tricks. I never saw so vicious a look as she gave me."

CHAPTER II.

A DISMAL HOUSEHOLD.

WHEN Dr. Pinkerton was gone, Mr. Lepell and his daughter talked a long time together. He delighted in having her sitting beside his bed, and she read to him. She was a very gentle, affectionate girl; and his soft eyes, as they rested on her, grew yet softer. The father and daughter found a great comfort in thus speaking together; and very often the book was laid aside—the history or novel: in which, to say the truth, he took not very much interest—for his attention seemed always to be wandering away. At this time Mrs. Lepell was below at her lunch—a chop and a glass of claret—for what with the affairs (his daughter was as helpless as a child), and the patient upstairs, she had a good deal on her mind. After the lunch she

sat in her easy-chair and rested a little. She was still very indignant with the doctor, and smiled a little to herself, as she thought how pleasantly she had punished his freedom. "It will be a good lesson to him; perhaps he will find that he has lost a very profitable job."

The day thus wore on, which was indeed the pattern of many days. The anxious lady of the house had many concerns to look after. There was a little furniture—odds and ends, in addition to the more weighty and necessary matters—the "furnishing," in short, which every newly-furnished house requires. She had a great deal "on her mind," as she often said gently, of herself, not with repining, but accepting her lot cheerfully. Who was there to share the load with her? Had she not become a nurse to a hopelessly broken husband; and as for the young girl, considering that it was not a usual thing to have such an arrangement during the first months of such a marriage it would not be unreasonable to ask that she should take her share in the labours of the place? How-

ever, Mrs. Lepell made no complaint—none in the world—and accepted her lot, whatever it was, with exceeding cheerfulness, and contenting herself with working like “a contented and willing little horse.” This was her own phrase. It should not come from *her*—the beginning, at least, of whatever was to come.

Thus then the day went by. The lamps were lighted and tea brought in. The mistress of the house made it, unassisted and alone. There was no sympathy for her. Upstairs the father and daughter were still sitting and talking together; and yet scarcely talking, for the father would merely ask a question, and for the rest of the time hold her hand, and look listlessly at her eyes.

“Don’t you like that doctor, papa?” she asked. “Is he not kind and considerate; and something about him so firm and confident, that I am convinced he is to do you good, and make you quite well again.”

Mr. Lepell sighed.

“I don’t know,” he said; “but I do like him.

I feel hope when he is by ; and I should like if he came to me often."

" So he will, papa ; he said he would be here at eleven to-morrow morning."

" I am glad of that," he said, " not that I am worth wasting our little money upon ; but I should like to see his face now and again. But he can't make me well, though—I don't know—there is something strange over me ; and *then*, my darling, what will become of you ? "

The daughter stooped over gently, and kissed his lips.

" Think of *that* always, dearest papa," she said ; " what will become of me, and make it help you to stay with us. Why, you are quite strong now ; the doctor says so. Only, he says, if you let any idea fasten on you, it will keep you from getting well. So, for *my* sake you will promise me ? Oh, papa," she said, her face suddenly contracting with terror and pain, " you will think of that, what is to become of *me*—where shall I turn to *then* ? *There will be no one left.*"

A strange blankness, and almost despair, came into his face. He seemed to answer what was passing in his mind more than the words she had spoken.

“My darling, my child, how can you ever forgive me? I thought I was doing all for the best. I thought it was all honour and duty—indeed I did; and I felt such pity and grief; and then I thought that you—I did indeed—that you and she wished anything that I wished. Did you not—or—did you?—for it now seems so long ago.”

The little girl soothed him.

“Yes, indeed, we did—I am sure we did; and it has all turned out very well—much better than it might have done. So you must not worry yourself, or think of it.”

“Turned out well?” he said, sadly. “When I look back to myself at that time—oh, how selfish, how wicked, how guilty I seem; so *meanly selfish*, to abandon you, my little dear, in that. But I was in a dream, a delirium, infatuated, stupified, and I almost hope I shall

be punished for it, and indeed an avenging hand has already fallen on me."

"Hush, hush, dearest," said the girl, almost passionately. "If you think in this way you will make me wretched too. The only thing that keeps us up is that. Don't—don't!" and she stooped down over him, and put her arms about his shoulders, and lifted him up, and with silent tears bursting from her eyes, pressed a kiss upon the pale white forehead.

They remained silent for many moments. The topics of consolation which both had been applying so laboriously had been given up now. It seemed agreed that all was idle and useless now. Suddenly the door opened, and the lady of the house looked in. It almost seemed an intrusion, for there was that curious scene, the silent and sobbing daughter, the melancholy and suffering father. Both looked up as she entered, and could make no attempt to conceal their misery.

Mrs. Lepell stood at the door a moment. She had a medicine that had been ordered in her

hand. She stopped in the doorway, and remained looking at both.

“Again!” she said. “Both are interchanging sorrows, and your wrongs. I have come to persecute afresh, you see,” and she held up the medicine bottle; “we must look to this plain, practical view of things, even at the risk of interrupting such tender communings. You had better go downstairs now, Miss Lepell. You should wait for the mornings, at least, for talking over the wrongs. How is your father to sleep to-night, pray, if his nerves are to be worked on? What can be the result but miserable tossing and fever? A really considerate daughter would keep such topics for daylight. I tell you, you had better go down now, and go to your bed too. And if I have any authority—and in this our patient here will support me, I am sure, for it is all for his own interest—I would have you wait until he is well before you begin dwelling on any of those unhappy matters for which there can be no cure of any kind now. I don’t ask you to help me, or to put yourself

to any trouble—*that* would be too unreasonable.”

There seemed to be sound truth in this, and the young girl hung down her head. Then looked irresolutely at her father.

“You won’t go?” said Mrs. Lepell, gently. “Well, with all my heart, stay, then. Would you like to give him this yourself? There, then”—and she handed it to her with an eagerness; the young girl took it.

“Yes, dearest, take it from me. It will do you good.” There was a pause. Irresolutely and in deep distress he glanced at Mrs. Lepell.

“No,” he said, “I can’t let you, dear. Your mamma, she was kind enough to bring it, and make it, too. Go down,” he added, hastily, “and *can’t* you do as you are told? This talking *does* excite me and makes me nervous.”

“If you have more to say together I can come back. I only speak for his good,” said Mrs. Lepell.

Without a word the young girl bowed her head,

and went away silently. She looked back irresolutely ; the wistful eyes strained towards her, as though he was now, indeed, abandoned ; and then the husband and wife were left together.

CHAPTER III.

MR. SEVERNE AT HOME.

WE now turn to another household. In a square, some three or four streets away, was a small house, with a very low door and no steps, which had become the residence of the Severnes. It was very neat, clean, and compact, nicely furnished, and might almost have done for a twin sister to that of the Lepells. It was scarcely, however, so well to do in the world. Mrs. Severne had only a modest jointure; and our Severne, her son, as an attorney and trustee or two, who had to do with the Severne estates, knew, had absolutely nothing. Who can tell, or who, indeed, has a right to know, to the very figure, what the fortunes are of their male and female neighbours? Even those who have authority for what they give out, cannot make allow-

ance for the proper deductions and additions. Still, from the style of living, lodging, &c., a sort of rough measure can be applied; and on this principle people said, confidently, that, "Oh, Mrs. Severne, she is pretty well off; a good six hundred a-year jointure." Of Severne, the young men of his acquaintance said, as confidently, "We all know *he* hasn't a sixpence." But *their* sixpence stood for four hundred pounds or so each, and represented only genteel rags and mendicity. The difference between such an income and nothing was really inappreciable, so they did not give themselves the trouble to think that there could be such a thing as a gentleman "living on nothing!" But more valuable in their eyes than any poor five hundred a-year had been that contingency of succession to the late Sir John Digby's estates, which was considered so certain and was so well known, that it could be discounted into a very handsome income. But, alas! the truth really was, that Severne had now "not a sixpence" in the world, and was dependent on his mother's jointure. Yet he met this untoward

state of things without the least despondency—rather with a joyous alacrity. “Well,” he said, very cheerfully and very often, “I shall now have to work for my bread. It only comes to that.” Just as another man would say, “Now all our ready money is gone, I shall have to sell so much stock. It only comes to that.” The “work for his bread” that *he* could do was to be, in short, of such splendid quality that he had merely to announce that he was about to take off his coat and begin, and he would at once be hired. “Well,” he said, again and again, “it only comes to this—I must set to work and earn my bread.” For, as with the young men alluded to, a few hundreds a-year was equivalent to “not having a sixpence;” so that “bread” which young men of figure and genteel bringing up wish to earn, stands for earning good meats and second courses, and excellent wines daily.

The way this bread was to be earned, in Severne’s instance, was by “going to the bar.” His gentle mother had pleaded with remonstrance against such a step. They had interest, and good

interest—that is, *she* had. Lord Windowborough, who had been Foreign Secretary, would do anything for her. Long ago he had known that charming lady at Florence, when he was Ambassador and Lord Hoogley. He was now “in,” and she had only to write him a letter. There were a hundred channels—a hundred ways open. But Severne, in a bitterly stoical mood, yet not ungentle with her, “for women could not see the thing like men,” was *determined* to have no compliments. He *would* “earn his bread.” He had thought of it long at nights, in his bed, he said, on his pillow, “when others were fast asleep.” He would be dependent on no man. He would eat no man’s bread. He had determined on the bar. It would take time; not much money, certainly, but a deal of labour. It was not to his taste; but then it led to everything. There was no depending on rotten reeds there, he added, very bitterly; “no foolish leaning on promises, and delusive affection.” There you depended on yourself, thank God. Everything was straightforward and certain. You did your stroke of

work, whatever it was, like a man—right off, and took your money without shame. There could be no base, *unworthy*, *cruel* disappointments there. No; and Severne's lip quivered, and his voice trembled as he thought of this bitter mortification and wretched blow. And Mrs. Severne's gentle eyes filled up.

"Ah!" he said, one of these nights, when he was talking over his prospects, which was very often, indeed, "you don't know all I have had to go through. Even those miserable women with daughters. Not that I care. The men at the club, they are good fellows enough, and don't care about such things. Indeed, I should like to see one of them so much as alter his manner to me. They know better!"

And this was the tone of his evenings—not very cheerful, certainly, for the early days after the reverse. He had, however, taken the first formal step for the "bread-earning." His name was entered at an Inn of Court; he had begun to "read," and read hard at costly law books. He had determined to forswear all balls and amuse-

ments. "I am a Pariah now," he said, "I have worse than the mark of Cain on me. The mammas would shun me as if I was infected."

His mother, gentle and always compliant to every wish of his, remonstrated.

"But why give up altogether?" she said; you will meet people and make friends, who may turn out more useful than any hard reading. I would go out as much as before."

"Ah, dear mother, you don't understand. Indeed, you can scarcely—I know you mean well and for the best. But *how* can I do it? Have all the women pointing to me, and telling my story, for they all know it, every one of them? Goodness," he added, almost passionately, striking his forehead, "what a mystification! Why did he do it? why did he bring me up so deceitfully for so many years to that one expectation? It was cruel, and base, and wicked. I didn't want it. I didn't ask him. I only wished to be like other men. If he had given me a profession of my own, and told me to expect nothing from *him*, I could have said nothing. But to

deceive me, ruin and degrade me in this way—have people pointing me out as the *reduced gentleman*, ejected from his place—this was too malicious altogether. God forgive him for what he has done !”

The gentle mother would try hard to soothe him, but without effect; and evenings which should have been given to his “reading for the bar,” went by in this way, consumed by miserable retrospects.

But very soon the “reading for the bar” became almost unendurable. He said openly :

“I am taking a disgust to the whole; and whose fault is it? Not mine, certainly. I was brought up to other things. If it had been instilled into me when a boy that I was to earn my bread, *that* would have been a different thing, But as the tree falls, so it must lie; as it is planted,” added Severne, as if he were already addressing gentlemen of the jury, “so it must grow. If I had been so brought up, it had been a different thing. *Now*, whose is the fault?”

He put all this very well and effectively,

arguing it in many ways, and with much varied illustration, dwelling on his own unhappy situation with singular fluency and even relish. Indeed he had often said, that when he got to the bar, an easy unconventional speech to the judge and gentlemen of the jury would be the department in which he would certainly excel. There are people who thus (in a comfortable arm-chair) laboriously and complacently prove that their situation is the most hopeless and desperate in the world.

But all this while Mr. Severne, though "earning his bread" with the best intentions in the world, was still spending a good deal of money. He had been brought up "like a gentleman," and had the tastes of a gentleman. Was that *his* fault, he would ask again, or the fault of those who so brought him up? He must have "his glass of wine" and "his horse" now and again, and his other little luxuries. God knows, he said, *they* did not cost much, and Heaven knew how much he had fallen from. Luckless Severne, it was hard not to pity him now.

Hard, certainly, not to pity him still more, when the marble table in their little hall began to bud, as it were, all over with an efflorescence of papers and letters—the plentiful crop of old bills and demands arising from his freer and more opulent days. These might have “stood over” as long as he pleased; it would have been “no matter,” and “any time” would have done, according to the agreeable complacency of the rich man’s creditor. Which pleasant verbiage and Louis Quatorze courtesy had disappeared, to give place to short business-like demands; to be succeeded by the more blunt and peremptory requirements, and finally by impolite “threats.” But, by-and-by, these were succeeded by the writers of the letters themselves, who came and stood in the hall, and made their demands in person. It was only when this sort of probation began, that Severne at last realised the inconveniences of his situation. And it must be said, indeed, that this weary battling with “duns,” always beginning, never ending,—becoming the day’s portion as it were,—is the most cruel *désil-*

lusionment, for any genteel, good-looking child of fashion, who has been accustomed to deal insolently and haughtily with traders and shopkeepers as the very dregs of the earth, and perhaps by the name of "brutes." There is a miserable squalor almost in all this descent and degradation; and under such conditions it was no wonder that Severne's heart began to give way, and the pleasantries of "earning one's bread" became a vapour.

But this decay was spread over some time. These were but so many hints of what was going on slowly from day to day, through many weeks, and we can all fill in the gathering shades and touches of the process by which, from being a sort of cradled and petted darling, the gallant Severne came to suffer rude indignity, both in speech and action, and was overlaid, as it were, with a moral mildew and decay. Every man, said Douglas Jerrold, wants a thousand pounds; and the genteelest has, at some time, been "pressed" by tradesmen. But all this is more or less anticipation.

CHAPTER IV.

LORD JOHN DINES OUT.

WE have yet a third household to peep into. Occupying lodgings in a little pinched house not very far from a stable, yet nearer to a great and fashionable square, the two Palmers, mother and daughter, lived *their* life. They had an introduction or two; but Mrs. Palmer, who was business-like, even in pleasure, soon turned casual acquaintances, made in foreign places, to profit. She burrowed into the great London soil; and, so to speak, unearthed them. Quiet but well-born people recollected the pleasing mother and brilliant daughter, whom, with the compromising familiarity of foreign places, they had taken to their bosoms with pledges of future favour and welcome. Though the cold skies and prosy atmosphere of old England bring a certain awaken-

ing from such a dream, and such welcome with a stare of surprise the acquaintance who "turns up" so unexpectedly, in the broad daylight, after the footlights have been extinguished, and the little comedy of foreign "outing" is over for good. But Mrs. Palmer was one of the trained soldiers of fortune and life. She did not accept the attitude in which the ordinary occurrences of life would place any one else. She made them—and without much effort—take other shapes, that suited *her* purpose better; and besides, she had recommendations of her own, and by her own merits could repay those who so patronised her. She was a firm, steady, yet not pushing, lady, that "made her way," with a calm composure, too, that caused those before whom she sat to feel that she was their mistress. No one knew much about her; but still there was an indistinct impression everywhere, that she and her daughter were refined and desirable people of genteel family, but of not very opulent means, whom it was very suitable to know, and "have at your house."

In this class were the William Archbolds—a “well-off” family of a certain good nature and simplicity, which comes of living a good deal in the country. This sort of amiable rusticity can do no harm when balanced or overlaid by plenty of means and a handsome fortune; but if it ever came to “pushing one’s way” in life, where there is such a fierce competition, and where anything that is worth having, is only to be obtained by hindering some one else from getting it, they must have dropped behind hopelessly. Most of us know our William Archbolds. We meet our William Archbolds generally abroad in their first flush of delight, with all the new sights and people about them; our William Archbold, who has plenty of money, wearing a white waistcoat, and bringing his whole family about with him, in a generous and costly manner. The other men there pronounce him a real good fellow and “no mistake” (though privately “a little bit of an ass”), and he would not leave Bessie or little Polly at home for the world. He is eager also to make friends, and generous in “standing” a

dinner, or sending to you to take some of his champagne. Nay, he is proud when you do him that honour, for he has found some of "your young swells and whipper-snappers" rather inclined to resent such offers of hospitality. The Mrs. William Archbolds that we know too belong to the simpering matrons, who feel that they have been greatly kept back for years by their rustic seclusion, and who are only now beginning to take their place in the world, and be appreciated. In the country, alas, they were "the best people in the world;" but when they go back, it is likely that our William Archbolds will have grown false and ambitious, and utterly spoiled.

Before going home to Archbold, they had taken a house in town for a few months, "to give the girls a polishing." Our William Archbold had made a little protest. There was the estate to be looked after, and the place, and the new out-offices which were building, and the county meetings—"and you know, my dear, this expedition has made a pretty fair hole in the treasury. We have done very fairly until *next year*"—a

view, however, that did not come home to Mrs. William Archbold.

Our Archbold family were established handsomely in a good quarter. They had met Mrs. Palmer and her daughter in their travels; and Mrs. Archbold had been delighted with that lady's knowledge of the world and acquaintance with "high people." Mrs. Palmer had in consequence been pledged to "come and see them down at Archbold; mind, now, we'll look out for you!"—in that "effusion" of foreign affection which has been alluded to. When they met in town they were glad to welcome their new friend, asked her to their house, and showed her to their rustic acquaintances. They were now giving a dinner, and Mr. Archbold, having been lucky enough to "pick up" a real bachelor lord, that noble person had, in a very friendly way, agreed to come and take his slice of mutton at their house, instead of at his club.

The bachelor lord kept them waiting a long time, very nearly half an hour past their hour, and then entered without any apology. This

was pronounced afterwards the pink of noble manners; for one of your vulgar people, you see, would have gone on apologising and making a fuss. He had to be introduced to Mrs. Archbold—a ceremony also performed with great nervousness. Mrs. Archbold could have prostrated herself before him for this condescension: but he had the most free and easy manners, and set her perfectly at her ease—as, indeed, he had done many a woman before her—"My dear lady, ask them about me in the Rue Notre Dame Lor—ahem! You know where that is." Indeed she did not, simple lady: nor the charming beings to whom that region was consecrated. In fact, as it was no other than our friend Lord John, it needs no words to tell us that though he hardly knew a soul there, he was perfectly at home in a moment.

The staple of the party was made up of some rustic people—rough, agricultural persons, "but who could buy and sell you and me." He dropped into a snug easy chair, next Miss Palmer. "Well, my dear," he said, "how have

sprawling in the middle of the table ; or, begged like their shabby waiters at seven and six a piece. But I can tell you, my friend, they don't get me so cheap as they fancy. I manage to take some of the colour from their faces before I go home, and make them wince a little—and know their place, my boy, and not play tricks with the aristocracy. There were people called Hoby or some such name—that got hold of me, for a dinner—lawyers, I believe, saving your presence—as mean and scraping a lot as you ever set eyes on—and they set us down to a lot of cheap champagne and claret—that positively destroyed me *here*, sir ! The thing was jobbed by contract—and jobbed cheap—scamped, sir ! I made the fellow blush at the head of his own table. I exposed him, I can tell you !”

His lordship was seated next Miss Palmer on one side. The lady of the house, whom he had taken down, and who was inclined to interrupt him, he soon silenced and reduced to a nervous trepidation with a “ My dear lady, where did they get hold of *you* ? ” He wished to talk to Miss

Palmer, whom he admired, and who, he said after dinner, "was as fine a bit of wall fruit as you'd see on a tree." Mrs. Archbold once more struck in after her first correction, and had to be dealt with summarily.

"My good lady, do be reasonable. Keep your eye on that butler of yours, and for God's sake tell him not to creak with his shoes so—it makes me ill. Look at that other creature—one of the hired wretches we must all have in to help the regulars. See how he is 'blowing' into our plates and faces. There's lots to look after, ma'am; don't you see my little game with the pretty girl on my left here?"

The lady could only smile awkwardly at this reproof, which was, however, spoken in the most good-humoured way possible.

Miss Palmer was very reserved, and had indeed rather shunned the vicinity of Lord John. But that noble lord was not, as he said himself, "to be done in that way." A hunting young man had made for the place, but Lord John promptly tapped him on the arm.

"Beg your pardon," he said, "*we* are to sit there. You'll let our Lady of the House choose her place?"

Abashed, the hunting man stumbled out of the way, falling over a chair. Another seat had been marked out for the "lady of the house," after much anxious deliberation; but his lordship must, of course, have his own pleasant way.

"Come now," said he to Miss Palmer, "you're as sore against me as anything—I know you are. You made a set against me from the post."

"I did not indeed," said she, coldly. "I suppose we hardly exchanged a dozen words."

"No matter," said his lordship; "you don't like a bone in my—My God! they call this French cookery—bone in my skin. I suppose some wretched scullion has been got in to do the whole job—lock, stock, and barrel—for ten and sixpence. No, you don't like me; you think I'm free and easy, you do."

"I think nothing about it, one way or the other;" and she turned to her neighbour, an

amiable young gentleman, newly put into the public offices. "Were you out to-day—were you in the Park—I suppose you were?"

The youth answered eagerly—

"Not to-day, but I was yesterday. It was quite gay. I sat there for two hours; and I saw Lord Cinquports come round three or four times in his drag, with four of the most perfectly matched bays you ever——"

Lord John did not relish this slight. "I say, Mr. Archbold," said Lord John.

For a second there was a silence—an obsequious silence. The lord was going to speak. Pleased and nervous, Mr. Archbold said—

"Yes, my lord!"

"Look here, sir, at my neighbour here—I'll tell the whole thing out," said his lordship. "By the way, those truffles—really—very fair;" and his lordship looked round restlessly.

"Bring them back—bring them to Lord John," said the master of the house, almost fiercely, and in dreadful agitation at this honour.

The butler and the strange attendant, whom Lord John had called "a hired beast," stumbled over each other, and got "clubbed" in their confusion at this exceptional demand. The guests looked on with silent awe and admiration. *We* should like to have seen *them* ask to have the truffles brought back.

"I learned to like these things at—Paris, where I was taught"—Lord John all this time was leisurely picking out his truffles—"taught to eat by a very charming and virtuous young person—that—I was—in love with at the time," added his lordship, with perfect gravity. "But at Digby, where Miss Palmer and I were together, and the greatest friends, we fell out, on account of a certain young fellow whom I took up, and she would abuse me if I said a word for him. I knew what all *that* meant. I could tell the most diverting adventures about our stay at Digby. A fine young fellow there, that some of the Novel fellows would give their eyes to clap in their books, brought up to an estate, and suddenly degraded, ma'am, as it were; cut off

with twopence three farthings. Frightful, isn't it? Makes us doubt if there be a Providence at all over our heads."

This profanity rather shocked some of the more serious guests, but Mrs. Archbold only smiled with delight; and it is to be feared, if the nobleman had denied the existence of a Supreme Being itself, in his own droll way, would have only smiled the more.

Miss Palmer had started as she heard this.

"I don't quite believe that," said she, very bitterly. "Poor, poor Severne; and is he reduced so low as that? Goodness! can nothing be done for him?"

"Oh, never fear him," said Lord John, confidentially, "he'll do well enough. He has his eyes open. You remember what I said about discounting one's face—that is, if one *has* one. Well, he's hard at work in that direction—I have reason to know it. And let me tell you, it's the only sensible thing he's done this many a day. There we go! Your time's come. Look at the women trying to catch each other's eyes. Look

at the smirking and wincing—my God, what acting goes on! Well, good-by, if you must go.”

When the ladies were gone, Lord John went up to the place of honour, and there, as it were, took the command. The other men guests were full of awe and reverence—none more than his host.

“Help yourself, Lord John,” said he, proudly. Indeed, he delighted in striking that chord. “Lord John,”—it had such melody! “I think you’ll find that more than fair claret.”

“I remark every man says that of his own,” said Lord John, “even when there’s some poisonous stuff just been decanted before your very eyes. The brazenness of our day is something wonderful. Not that *this* isn’t very drinkable, and as you modestly say, very fair. I don’t believe,” added his lordship, sipping it slowly, and inclining his glass to one side, “that this is worse than what’s put before you at *A*, *B*, or *C*’s table—in fact, rather better I suppose than what *C* gives—whom we all know, of course.”

All the guests looked as if they knew who he meant.

“ I assure you, Lord John, though it is not the thing to talk of prices, &c., the sum I gave for that wine would surprise you.”

“ My good friend, and well-intentioned host, do I dispute that? Did I dispute old Digby, who turned up his toes the other day, coming to me and saying, ‘ I know it’s not the thing to talk of prices, but the sum I gave for that horse would surprise you, namely, two fifty.’ ‘ It does *not* surprise me, sir, for I can see with my own eyes, that the thing is a mere screw, and not worth tuppence halfpenny.’ Surely you have not lived to this time of day without learning that price alone won’t do without judgment to back it? The sooner you get *that* notion out of your head, my friend, the better and cheaper for you. I speak for your own interest, you know. What is it to me, of course, if you fill your cellars with all the “ rotgut ” in the kingdom ? ”

“ Oh no, it is most kind indeed,” said Mr.

Archbold, almost hot with confusion, and overwhelmed with this strange word.

“Don’t mention it,” said the other; “not but that this is very decent tippie indeed, and I am sure can be drunk without bad consequences—very fair indeed.”

So fair, indeed, that though everybody else had done, and was eager to join the ladies, his lordship only faintly protested against another bottle being opened for his special benefit.

“Now don’t do that,” he said. “Ah, I see—our friend opposite,” and he marked out a pink and fat gentleman opposite to him, and of very few words; “it’s touched *his* palate, I see, eh? Gratify him, sir. Gratify him, by all means. I’ll help you out with a glass or two.”

The stout gentleman, who indeed cared little for such drink, was half alarmed, half flattered by such notice.

“No, indeed,” said he; “on the contrary, I have been taking very little of it.”

“O my goodness,” said Lord John; “that’s your line, is it! Just listen to him! Trying to

excuse himself. There's nothing to be ashamed of, sir, let me tell you! That's really not bad. Here, set it down before this gentleman. You're sponsor for this bottle, and now take the head off without any more shyness."

Every one was delighted with his lordship's humour, but every one had long since had enough wine, so that to his lordship was left the monopoly of the new bottle. The pink, stout gentleman, a little flattered after all by the late recognition of Lord John, was inclined to take his share, so as to have the credit of being in some sort of partnership with his lordship. But Lord John, seeing him thus encroach, was inclined to punish him.

"No, no," he said, "that gentleman there is inclined to *renchérir* upon what he said. Between you and me, I *think* he meant to throw reflections on your vintage, my friend. Now, I shall act for our host here, and just cut him off, as a punishment, ordering him to concentrate himself on the sherry, as a good lesson."

To thus punish the gentleman, who became

greatly confused and heated at this public notice, his lordship kept the claret very comically by him, finishing it eventually; and as he detained the gentlemen, he was rather amusing with various anecdotes, which usually began, "When I was in training in Paris, getting my education, you know—learning to mortify and bring my appetites into subjection, and chastise the body, sir,—which, I am sorry to say, our friend opposite seems *not* to have done," &c.

The result was, when they went up to join the ladies, his lordship was in excellent humour—almost in "effusion," as he would say himself.

"Now, I tell you the truth, Archbold," he said, as he went up stairs, "don't go to bed unhappy, or be taking it out of your wife at breakfast. That last bottle was devilish good, no matter what that stuck-up voluptuary opposite may say. Don't mind him; he don't know B from a bull's foot. I can see it from the mere cut of him. It's very fair stuff indeed; quite good enough to put before *him*, and a dev'lish

deal better than he ever sits down to, I'll swear. Tell us now what you give for it, and where?"

"I assure you, my lord, it costs me a hundred and eight shillings a dozen to lay it down."

"Well, I'd give it eighty-four—not worth more. But d—n that fellow opposite—from his airs one would think you were giving us common *ordinaire*, at a franc a bottle."

From that night Mr. Archbold regarded his rustic friend with a secret hostility. "I'll never let him inside my doors," he said to Mrs. A. next morning. "Such ill manners. As Lord John said, he wasn't accustomed to sit down to drink such wine as that. Indeed he wasn't. Cock him up!"

Lord John entered the drawing-room with a radiant face, and eyes that sparkled a good deal. He went over to Mrs. Palmer straight, and flung himself into a chair beside her, regardless of Mrs. Archbold's springs. More guests had been invited "on the strength of the lord."

He told some one after, that he and Mrs. P. were very old friends. "Long ago, my good sir

—in the days when I was being educated in Paris —she was as sweet a young creature, sir, as ever put a needle in a bonnet.”

The two were, in a moment, deep in conversation. Mrs. Archbold heard fragments of their talk, which she retailed to her husband. Indeed Lord John spoke in a very loud voice, that might be heard over the room.

“Don’t throw her away,” he said, “on that pauper. The fellow has nothing before him but the workhouse. I don’t like to see a fine girl sacrificed, you know, to a soft, sighing, sentimental creature like that, who’d never earn as much as a common day labourer in the field.”

Mrs. Palmer, who spoke in a very low voice, seemed to remonstrate, with “Affections set on him,” &c.

“On her grandmother,” said his lordship, with strong contempt. “Her heart set on him? What does that mean, I’d like to know. It’s mere nursery talk. I know girls and women—no man better—and I tell you it’s nursery talk.

I like her, Mrs. P.; there is a bold smartness about her very much to my taste, ma'am."

Mrs. Palmer shook her head again, and seemed to dissent. Lord John suddenly sat up in his easy chair (he had been lying back, talking with his face to the ceiling), and turned to look at her steadily in the face.

"Ah, I see," he was heard to say. "Now I know what the game is. Affection set on him. Ah, that's not so bad. I say, Archbold, that looks like our friend Burke's peerage—by the way, worth a dozen of your old Lodges and Dodds, rascals that dock and curtail and cut us up shamefully. I am not going to look for the House of Raby I can tell you. I leave all that to my lucky elder brother. Well, ma'am, now let us see."

He had presently found what he wanted, and read it out, half to himself, half to her.

"'Severne, Fourth Viscount in the Kingdom of Ireland,' and all that rubbish. Here we are: 'Heir, his son, George Chiselhurst, born'—hem; 'married'—hem. Very good. Now, what

can you make of that? 'Married last year.' So by this time we should be sending for the good—a^hem—Doctor Locock—ma'am. Then comes in that Sawney, Severne. Ah, no sensible Jew would advance him sixpence halfpenny on his chances; no, nor Jewess either, ma'am."

("Such^{*} strange talk, Archy," said Mrs. Archbold, telling her husband; "they seemed so confidential together.")

"Then," she said, quite composed, "I was always fond of a little gambling, you recollect."

"Pooh—nonsense. Too fine a girl to be kept waiting. I tell you what, the whole gang of Rabys will be up in town next week, and we could do something for her *there*. Lots of loose men running in and out. Come and see you to-morrow evening. I get dry about four o'clock."

("These high people," added Mrs. Archbold, "talk so curiously.")

After that Lord John suddenly got up, and went across to Miss Palmer, with whom the pink-faced gentleman had become, as he told

his sisters next morning, to be "quite confidential."

"Beg your pardon," said Lord John, edging a chair right in front of him. "By your leave, as the Irish say. Private and confidential, you know. Excuse my back. We have been talking of you, your mamma and I, and I have been telling her what a regard I have for you, and how passionately you dote on me—eh?"

"Why do you always come to talk this nonsense to me?" she said, gravely. "I don't understand, nor do I care for it."

Lord John burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Capital," he said. "Go on with that. I like you to give me those raps. Do you know you remind me of that little round woman we met down at Digby, the most piquant creature I met since I was introduced to—ahem. Well, no matter. I wonder what has become of that Mrs. Lepell?"

Mrs. Archbold caught the word. "Lepell—the Lepells! Why, we met them—we knew them abroad," she said, with eagerness.

"That's not worth much now," said his lordship, laughing; "so did their hotel-keeper. 'Where are they *now*?' That's the point. The little round woman took care to give me her address; but, egad, I lost it—lit my cigar with it, I believe."

"I can tell you," said Mr. Archbold, almost proud at having the information required. "I saw her only a few days ago at church."

"Saw her at church?" repeated Mrs. Archbold, looking at her husband.

"Ah, ha! listen to this; uncommon good," said Lord John, in immense enjoyment. "Archbold's been on the sly; keep an eye on him Mrs. A., I warn you. She is as dangerous a little woman as ever had a husband, who, between you and me, she don't much—ahem. But I am bound in honour, you know. I assure you, at Digby all the women in the place made a set against her. We used to call her 'The Wife's Alarm.' Not bad that. Ah, Archbold, sad fellow! Come, sir, look your injured wife in the face. Have you been calling there? What's

the address? Out with it, and no shirking."

In great confusion at this extraordinary style of conversation, Mr. Archbold gave a foolish smile, which his wife told him afterwards was merely "idiotic," and faltered out, "Seventy-one, Brooke-street, I believe."

"He believes! Just listen to him," said the dreadful Lord John. "I tell you what, I hand you over to your outraged wife. Look here, Mrs. Archbold, parse him well on that. He's been at that woman's house, as sure as my name is Lord John. Look at the guilt written on his mouth. Work it out of him—wring it from him, ma'am. She was a little woman not inclined to let any one go. She once got hold of—I declare I must take myself off after all this. This man would corrupt any fellow's morals. I took this for a virtuous house, 'pon my word I did; but really our friend's depravity is shocking—brazen. Why, sir, can't you be content with a wife of your own?—and her husband sick and shut up in his bedroom from a squeeze he got in a

railway! Fie, fie! Here, I must give myself a glass of something after all this? What's this? Cognac vieux, m'sieu. P'tite verre—allez donc, m'amselle."

It must be said his lordship did not behave in this free manner in ordinary circles; but, as he said himself very justly, he "knew his company devilish well, sir;" and "if he had stood on his head" they were sneaks enough to have admired the thing. The party then broke up. Mrs. Palmer and her daughter had come in a cab, and were to go away in one. His lordship said he would take them home, and in spite of some protest from the young girl, did so. He enjoyed her dissatisfaction immensely. "She thinks I'll ask her to sit on my knee," he said, laughing loudly.

CHAPTER V.

SEVERNE'S TROUBLES.

AMONG the larger and more pressing creditors of our unlucky friend Severne, were two—Messrs. Payne and Hardy, the well-known West End tailors—tailors indeed to the sovereign ; and Mr. Slack, the no less known livery stable-keeper. All the young men of fashion got their clothes from Payne's house ; all the young men of fashion got a horse for their riding or their brougham from Slack. A gentleman from Messrs. Payne was always making his circuit round every barrack town in the kingdom, following her Majesty's army like a sutler. It was a joyful morning when it became known that "Payne's fellow" was in barracks, up at Jackson's rooms ; and many mornings were spent in delightful excitement, as Messrs. Payne's *chargé d'affaires*, a

gentleman of good address and elegantly persuasive manners, unfolded his treasures, and held out his yards of charming little squares and patterns—while all the “fellows” sat round on beds and on table corners, and wisely shook their heads, and joined in debate over disputed colours. Indeed the dealings of the firm were marked by the highest liberality. They were only anxious for “custom,” and, it would seem, not for payment. Wilcox’s story was long repeated in the regiment—to their honour and gentlemanly dealing. A Scotch and economical officer had insisted on a half-yearly payment, declaring he never went in debt; and Mr. Wilcox himself had heard the gentlemanly emissary say, almost pathetically, “At least leave *something* in our books, sir.” “And I vow to Heaven!” continued Wilcox, telling the story, “the Scotch fellow was touched, and took back a twenty pound note.”

Yet their principles of business were certainly fitful, and their proceedings had all the promptness and suddenness of a *Judgment* or of a Ne-

mesis. It was noticed that so long as the sun was shining and the day clear, time or delay was of no consideration. There were opulent men of fortune "in their books" for half a dozen years at a time, and who had merely gone on "ordering." Money was never asked from *them*. But was a gentleman known to be overtaken by cloudy weather, or caught in a storm, even for a time, the gentle character of the firm became changed. Nothing more cruel, vindictive, or even savage, could be conceived. They pursued him with a relentless hatred; they fastened their claws into him; they did not let him go a second. In the Court they opposed him with a bitter fury. Many and many a military creditor had they hunted out of the army, driving him to the sale of his commission; and yet Mr. Hardy, the manager and ambassador, and the Messrs. Payne, seemed to be the gentlest and softest of their kind, and seemed almost too unsophisticated for the wiles and deceits to which gentlemen of their profession were exposed.

Severne was one of their patrons, and had

always treated them with an "off-hand" manner peculiarly his own. He would walk into the shop, handsome, brilliant, and in high spirits. "Send me home this and that," he would say. "I want some studs and buttons; I lose half of mine every week. Best pink coral, mind. Let me see them myself. Mr. Payne, what a judge *you* are of such things!" Mr. Payne, feebly and almost grovellingly, acknowledged his deficiency in taste, and would beg pardon for it. They kept such ornaments by them "merely to convenience their customers." And it *was* a great convenience for those whose jeweller's account was a "good deal blocked up." As to settlement, Mr. Severne's tone with these gentlemen was nearly always the same. "This is all *your* look out," he would say. "I tell you plainly I have no money, and Heaven knows when I shall have any! You are certainly the most confiding of tailors. If you don't know your own interest I am not to teach it to you." But Payne would answer gently, as if the folly was hopelessly ingrained, and that he must pay the penalty

of this weakness: "Ah, Mr. Severne, some of these days you will be a rich man, and then perhaps you will think of us."

"Rich man! You *have* faith and hope and charity. By the way, you must build me up a dress coat—and, let me see, I suppose I shall want a shooting suit—a quiet tweed; or wait, you may as well make it a whole dress suit—that's a new trouser, send me that as well"—&c.

We should scarcely have courage to put down at its proper figure the amount to which Mr. Severne stood in Messrs. Payne's books. It was something not very far short of one thousand pounds; and yet this sum, considering the sums the firm charged for the very smallest article of dress, was considered moderate for a young gentleman of his expectations. There was the young future baronet—the to be Sir Rupert Cranmer, in whose instance this sum might be quadrupled. But then *it was said*, on what authority we know not, that part of this was for loans in specie, to help that young man over his embarrassments from

other creditors. For the Messrs. Payne were true Samaritans.

Going back a little to the time when our Harold Severne had begun to "work for his bread," he had on the first opportunity walked into this house. The young man had said to his mother, who had timidly and ignorantly asked, "Oh, Harold, what are these dreadful people, coming with these long outstanding bills?" that these things seemed more terrible at a distance than near; that it was no use making molehills into mountains, if we could avoid it; with more topics of the same sort. "Yes," he said, "a resolute man will calmly look his difficulties in the face, and it is surprising how, by so doing, they melt away!" There was much truth in this. Men, he would have implied, are a little the sport of their imaginations; they give way to morbid exaggeration of their wrongs and difficulties, which, after all, may be born of selfishness.

Full of this simple way of confronting his embarrassments, he, as we have said, walked straight

into the tailoring house. He knew what was suited to his dignity, and to the nature of the situation, so he was careful to "drop" the lofty dictatorial manner he habitually assumed to these gentlemen.

"Where is Mr. Payne?" he said; "be good enough to send him out to me. Ah, I see him in the office."

Mr. Payne came out with his kind welcome, "Come to see us, Mr. Severne? What can we do for you, sir, to-day?"

"Nothing, I am afraid, Mr. Payne. The fact is, I wanted to speak to you on business. Better shut this door, if you please."

A curious look was stealing over Mr. Payne's face—a look of distrust and suspicion.

"Shut the door, sir?" he repeated.

He said this mechanically, as it were; he really meant, "What mischief does all this mystery portend?" Severne was always in the habit of talking for all the shop.

"I may as well tell you at once," said Severne, hastily, and perhaps a little nervously, "how

things stand. Sir John Digby is dead, as you have heard——”

“Not a word of it,” said Mr. Payne, colouring; “not a word; I don’t understand at all, sir. We have heard nothing of it; when did this——”

Severne coloured too.

“Let me finish,” he said. “And it seems Sir John, for reasons of his own, has thought proper to leave his estates away from me.”

Mr. Payne started back. “Here, Mr. Hardy, sir, step in here a moment. Listen to this. He has come here to tell us Sir John Digby is dead, and has left away the whole estate.”

“Well! What is that to us?” said Mr. Hardy, gravely. “We of course look to this gentleman himself—to *his person*; to pay us our demands. He knows of course that they must be made out *at once*, under the circumstances.”

“That was what I came to you for,” said Severne, now a little scared out of his doctrines, by the demeanour of the two creditors; “to ask your forbearance and indulgence, while I look

about me. At this moment, or indeed for a long time, I feel I ought to tell you frankly, it will be out of the question. I shall have to earn my bread now like other people; but I can promise you, you shall be the first considered."

Mr. Payne broke out here, almost into a laugh.

"Earn your bread, sir! That is good. That's not the way we're to be settled with. No 'doing,' sir, with us."

Mr. Hardy laid his hand gently on his partner's arm. Severne coloured furiously.

"Do you dare to speak to me in that way, you pair of extortioners, after all you have got from me?"

Mr. Hardy was the peace-maker.

"We should do things regularly," he said. "There is no use in this sort of language; it will neither pay us nor raise money. Now, sir—Mr. Severne, what can you do? what do you propose? what day do you name?"

Severne looked round on his two enemies with quivering lips.

"I tell you, you must wait a little—by-and-bye, when I have begun to earn money——"

They laughed.

"No, no," said Mr. Hardy, smiling. "We know what *that* means. Here, let us have something in hand. Four hundred, three, two, one?"

Severne shook his head. "I can't—I can't indeed. I have so many claims."

"Upon my word," said Mr. Payne, "this looks very bad. Have you no proposal to make?"

What could our unhappy Severne propose? What *can* a poor man propose? After much discussion it was arranged that a little money was to be put "down," and that for the rest the firm were to take bills, at a short date. It was with a hanging head and downcast eyes that Severne passed through the languid young men, who looked at him askance, and understood the whole situation. But they were quite respectful, and one *as usual* having a reverence for a gentleman in adversity, held the door open to let him out.

But at that moment came bounding up the steps, Selby and Ridley, and behind them Mr. Monkhouse, member for a little borough. Selby looked grave as he saw him. He knew of his friend's reverses, but had been away, and had not learned that he was at all "pressed." He was one of those who assumed in short that every one in the world can at least pay for breakfasts and dinners, and "put good clothes on their backs." Credit at a tailor's is the last familiar that abandons us.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am so glad. Come in with me here; I want to talk to you."

Severne rather shook himself free. His face was hot and glowing.

"I can't, now," he said. "Let me go. I have business. Don't keep me."

"Business," cried Ridley, "*that's* good. Business with old Payne! Come in, Severne, my friend. Choose me a pair of knickers, your taste is undeniable;" and he put his arm in his.

"Don't worry," said Severne, shaking himself free. "I tell you I have business. You can choose your clothes for yourself by this time;" and he hurried off.

"What on earth is wrong with him," said Ridley, in amazement. Then, with sudden warmth, "What the devil does he mean by speaking in that way to me?"

Mr. Monkhouse, a tall elderly red-faced man, very sardonic in manner, looked after him, and said slowly—

"I tell you what—our friend Payne has been sending him to school."

They went in. In a few minutes the three gentlemen had it "all out of Payne;" the languid young men whispering at the recital, but apparently in business.

"You'll be hit, my friend, as sure as my name is Monkhouse," said that gentleman, comforting the partners. "Here, give me a light, Payne, or some of your fellows. I always told you so. I never knew an expectant that wasn't hit or bit. Why, damme, I was an expectant myself, on an

old aunt—as tough and stiff a bit of old grizzle as ever hung on in the world after her time. She *wouldn't* die — no, by the Lord. The melons and sweets she got regularly out of me; and at the end, after all, I was *bit*—I was.”

Mr. Payne told the story in all its details in a very injured way. The other partners stood about, and furnished more details of this nefarious conduct.

“I wouldn't 'ave believe it, sir,” said Mr. Payne, all but holding up his hands. “Such ingratitude; a gent of his bringing up, too; and to come to us so cool.”

“Quite right, Payne,” said Mr. Monkhouse. “Here, a light again, will you? Nothing lights now-a-days.”

One of the languid young men came gliding up.

“Mr. Payne, sir, there's Lord John in an 'ansom at the door, about that coat; I told him it can't be done till four o'clock. *Will* you see him, sir?”

Lord John appeared at the door himself.

"Well, how often am I to come? What d'ye mean, Payne?—sending, sending; I'm sick of it. I won't put up with it. It's not the way to treat me. Four o'clock yesterday this fellow swore on his soul."

"Indeed, my lord. Fact is, Lord John, there was a mistake about your coat;" said Mr. Payne, gravely improvising a story; "we told off two of our best hands for your coat, and we found 'em beastly drunk at ten this morning; they've been turned off on the spot, Lord John." The truth was his lordship was not regarded with much respect in the house—giving very poor orders—and being slack in payment.

"Bosh! Hallo! Monkhouse," said Lord John, turning sharply on him; "that's you? What's this old women's gathering here? what are you all hatching together?"

"Egad, you should have been here five minutes ago," said Mr. Monkhouse, leaning leisurely against the counter with folded arms, and closing his eyes to enjoy his cigar; "we had a poor

broken devil here whining for mercy to Shylock there. Of course he got it, I needn't tell you."

"*That's* nothing new," said Lord John. "God help us all, when it comes to our turn. And who was this, now?"

Then all went off into an account of the story. Mr. Payne affected confidence. He wouldn't say, but all might come straight again—a declaration that made Lord John roar again; but he listened with the greatest eagerness.

"Egad! I always said we'd have something of the kind; met him again this year at Digby, and his airs were sickening. By the Lord, sickening is the only word. O, Payne, you'll never get tuppence of your money. I know the whole stock. Not tuppence, sir; make up your mind to that on the spot, sir. I have reason to know it. Here, Payne. This way a moment; about that coat?"

Mr. Monkhouse pointed with his stick after him.

"I bet you he's goin' to stick the tailor for brandy. He always does it reg'lar. All that

about the coat and four o'clock, a damned lie; just for an excuse, you know, to come here. I wonder he hasn't a corner cupboard in his cab."

Lord John indeed did presently come out very brilliant and stimulated, and in much better sprits than when he entered.

"Poor Payne," he said, in great enjoyment; "mind, you won't get tuppence off that feller. I tell you so. I am much better now. I feel as if you had put a stitch in me. That unlucky devil—I knew he'd stick his arm into the wrong sleeve at last. There's metaphor for you from your own trade."

And his lordship went off in great good humour.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERVIEW.

It may be readily conceived how a few days of this process levelled the soaring spirit of Severne, and opened his eyes. As he came home, after some of those humiliating embassies, he told his mother, "he was heart-sick." His interview with the liveryman was indeed enough to make him so. That person was of blunt "straightforward" manners, even in his most prosperous moments. When he received moneys, it was in a grudging way—complaining, as though *that* fell short of his due. It was 'ard to get, and whatever was got, was long kep from him. When Mr. Severne, therefore, waited on him, not to beg—but to propose—forbearance, Mr. Slack drew up his shirt-sleeves above his elbows—he received his debtors without his coat—and

placing them akimbo, burst into a volley of horse abuse.

“Look ye here, mister, what d’ye take me for. D—me, I’ll not give you an hour. Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, so you ought. Honest men are to kip ’osses for fine people, and then be done out of their ’arnings.”

“Mr. Slack !——”

“What d’ye come here for ? Go along out o’ this. I tell you I’ll have the law of you, afore twelve hours is over,” &c.

And yet, after all, Severne found this rude, bare-armed ostler—for he was no better—the most tractable of all his persecutors, “that black-guard of a horse-dealer,” as his customers called him, being only rough in his language. If he had found all like him, Mr. Severne would have fared exceedingly well, and struggled through. But there were others ; the Jew jeweller, Rosenthal, who received him as he always did, and had heard within a few hours, as he heard everything, of Sir John Digby’s disposition. This gentleman was civil, and smiling, said he was exceed-

ingly sorry, and even took out a tray of "elegant new tings," in the way of chains and coral, for his visitor to look at. These civilities made Severne's heart sink, for he knew that a Hebrew solicitor was already instructed.

After a day of this miserable work he came home utterly prostrate and beguiled.

"He did it on purpose," he said, bitterly, thinking of Sir John; "he never liked me. He thought I was not obsequious enough—not sufficiently grovelling. No man then shall ever get me to be *that*—no, not if I was to go in rags!"

He passed by the little street where Mrs. Palmer and her daughter lived.

"Why don't *they* take to threatening and warning me off," he said, very bitterly. "I suppose that will come next."

With the sensitiveness of a man who feels himself decaying, he fancied he saw a kind of compassion that verged into contempt; certainly into superiority. Mrs. Palmer, for whom he never had any special regard, was, of course, prompting the daughter. A true worldly woman,

with her wares to sell to the first Pasha or Aga that offered. This was what was in his mind, as he rang the bell. He sat in the drawing-room, restless and walking about. There was a long delay in coming down, which made him chafe yet more. He was about ringing for the maid when Mrs. Palmer came in. She was always a cold, composed woman; but he thought on this occasion she "took him easy."

"Well," he asked, "where is she; dressing, I suppose?"

"No, Fanny is out," said Mrs. Palmer.

"Out! O of course. I understand."

"Of course? Why do you say that? You understand? Ah, I see something has put you out to-day."

Severne's brow contracted.

"I have not much to put me in good humour, as I daresay you know pretty well. Every news travels pretty fast, now-a-days. The world is a delightful, a charming—place."

Mrs. Palmer looked at him with an inquiring stare. Then shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't follow," she said. "It would indeed be a delightful place if we had to interpret the mysterious changes we see about us every day. Fanny is out; had to go to her dressmaker."

"Ah! *now* I see," he said, "balls, dinners. So all *that* goes on."

"Why not? we are asked a good deal. Lord John, whom you introduced us to at Digby, is very kind, indeed, in getting us to know people."

"Lord John Raby," repeated Severne, "and you are intimate with *him*? Then let me tell you, if you have not knowledge of the world enough to have found it out before, he is not at all a suitable acquaintance. Not at all. I do not approve of a young girl like Fanny receiving civilities from him. It is my duty to tell you, a free disreputable man like that is no companion for respectable ladies."

"What is over you to-day?" said Mrs. Palmer, calmly; "you are finding fault with everything. Let me remind you that it was at *your* house we had the pleasure of meeting him."

"*My house?*" repeated Severne, in a trembling voice; "that is nice, certainly. I understand what you mean. It was *not* my house at the time. I am not responsible for Sir John Digby's acts. But still, Mrs. Palmer, you must forgive me, if I repeat that I *do* most solemnly object to Fanny's associating with a person of that sort."

"Quite right," said Mrs. Palmer, "quite proper. But there is no danger. I, her mother, am always with her. You can't expect us to behave absurdly, you know. I am not *quite* old enough to give up the world as yet; by-and-by will be time enough. Lord John takes an immense deal of trouble. He has introduced us to his family, who are now in town, and have quite taken up Fanny."

"Surely," said Severne, calmly, "she doesn't want that *now*. What object on earth—I put it to you sensibly—can she have in going on as other young ladies? I thought *that* was over now."

"Oh, it is always useful to have friends. We

all want them sadly. The poor child, too, mustn't be moped. She will have time enough for that. One of her beauty and gifts is not to be *quite* locked up in a chest or a cellar; there is plenty of time for all that. There is no harm in having her little holiday *en attendant*."

"I see," said Severne. "I see—quite—very proper, and very sensible and prudent—I follow. I suppose you have been hearing from Lord John, who has been telling you—he hears everything—the way I have been hunted and persecuted? Of course he has; the whole town knows it—he is too good-natured not——"

"We did hear indeed something," said Mrs. Palmer; "and Fanny was going to write to you. But is it all so bad as they say? I hope not."

"Quite," said he, maliciously; "worse, if you like. I see no opening. Of course, it is not much matter for you and her. You are going out and amusing yourselves; *I* have to fight the battle. I got another delightful piece of news this morning—did you hear *that*? Of course, it is nothing to me. *I* never considered the matter

at all, or let such a thought near me. But the world will chuckle over it."

Uneasiness came into Mrs. Palmer's face, and she moved in her chair with disquiet.

"What is all *this*, now?"

"You are getting disturbed," he said; "perhaps you guess it. There was a letter this morning from Smith, his lordship's excellent agent—of course to the tune in which I get all letters now—wanting money from me——"

"Well?" said Mrs. Palmer, all eagerness, and in her eagerness not heeding the bitterness of the last remark. "Well, and what is *his* news?"

"Why, he has only had a joyful letter from the old lord, with good news. The delicate heir, whose life we were told was not worth three years' purchase, and who only married some one to nurse him, after all this long trial, it seems, is to turn out a happy father."

Mrs. Palmer coloured and started up.

"This is good news. Really you *are* in luck!"

"Am I not?" said Severne, ruefully. "Not that that's a difference to *me*. Not in the least. I never thought it worth counting on for a second—I feel the same as I did yesterday."

"What charming philosophy; your equanimity is really to be envied. However, you don't speak for others."

"Others! No, of course not," said he, looking at her; "why should I? It makes no difference to *them* either, I should say."

"I don't know—I can't say," said she, walking about, and her colour rising every moment; "I really don't know how to look at the thing at all. I must consider, and consider for others too. Really, when a gentleman comes to be turned into a perfect scape-goat, and have a knack of drawing every sort of misfortune in his train, and seems to enjoy them too, it becomes a question whether the same ill-luck will not always pursue. You really have behaved in so extraordinary a manner to us altogether—bringing us here to England—deluding my unfortunate daughter

under fine prospects—that——How do you propose to make up to us for all this ?”

Severne was aghast. This attack seemed to overwhelm him.

“This from *you—you, for whom I have lost everything !*”

Mrs. Palmer proceeded.

“Oh, that is nonsense ; you might have managed it better. There was no need for all that heroism. I declare I lose patience when I think of the way things have gone ; and really, with all the grandeur of one who had ten thousand a-year ——”

He was utterly overwhelmed.

“This is worst of all,” he said ; “but I could not have expected much more. Still I know Fanny will——”

“Oh, as for Fanny, poor child ! she has worry enough. I can’t have her harassed, and I must really beg that you will not—as I have said, there is no hurry ; we really cannot be jumping in the dark. There is Lord John Raby, so kind and good-natured, and anxious to do everything for

her. His family are in town, and it is no harm if she have a little gaiety. She is entitled to it, heaven knows."

"Lord John Raby!" said Severne, bitterly; "a fine patron; a proper person to take up a young girl! Do you know what you are doing? Do you hear the stories about him? It is disgrace, contamination; and I *will* protest against such an intimacy if—ours is to go on."

Mrs. Palmer laughed. "Excuse me. That is a little too good. We met him at your house, was it not?"

The door suddenly opened, and Miss Palmer entered hastily. A gentleman was coming after her up-stairs.

"My dear child, give us a chance, d'ye hear? Ah, if I was running after you—in the gardens at St. Ryder—How de do, Mrs. P?"

Severne looked round at all three, from one to the other, with contempt and anger.

"I declare! Hallo! Severne," said Lord John. "So there *you* are. Just came on your track at Payne's, you know; you had only left a second

or two when I drove up. Curious, hey? Just drove up in my hansom; found Monkhouse and the whole gang of them chattering like so many monkeys when they get hold of nuts, you know. Egad! they seemed to have got hold of nuts *this* time."

"I suppose so. I don't doubt them," said Severne. "There are plenty of malicious people everywhere—more malicious than monkeys are, I can tell you."

Lord John laughed humorously to himself, enjoying something.

"To be sure there are," he said; "what would the world be without *them*, I should like to know? Now, Mrs. Palmer, to business—my precious sister-in-law, St. Ryder—the countess, you know—is going to give one of her gatherings. Lords, dukes, and swells of all sorts—an odious gathering; everyone absolutely packed on each other. 'Pon my soul, it's not decent; however, that's not *my* concern. The swells are to be there; so if you and mademoiselle—ah! *my* friend! *quelle a du fraicheur*. *Regardez, mon pauvre Severne!*

Ah, my dear, if I were a man—a gallant fellow, thinking of settling down in life—Well, the point is, you must go. One of their regular formal pasteboards will be handed in at the door, of course. I have settled it.”

“Oh, Lord John, you are getting angelic; you are too kind.”

“Not at all; you know I like you—always did, you know. Bless the memory of the cheerful past!”

And his lordship “hummed,” in the true nasal French twang:—

“Nos amours de la jeun-ess-e
Revient au grand ga-lop, ga-lop !
Tum ti, tu la ! tu lay !”

Severne had got up and walked impatiently and noisily to the window. “Disgusting!” he muttered, almost aloud. He motioned, with an imploring look, to Miss Palmer to follow him.

“Fanny,” said her mother, “come back here, dear. This is really kind of Lord John. You have been sadly moped lately. Wouldn’t you like to go, dear?”

"To be *sure* she would," said Lord John ; " I'll come for her myself in a hansom, and we'll rattle off together snug ; you, Mrs. P., following in a four-wheeler, if you like : " and he began to hum again :

" Les amours de no't jeun-ess-e—
Tum ti tu la tu lay ! "

" Severne, you can come, if you like ; I'll get you an order ; I have interest, you know."

" No, thank you, no," said the other, excitedly ; " don't exert it for *me*. I don't care to go to parties in *that* way ; I prefer being asked on my own merits."

" Oh, that's no affair of mine," said Lord John, coolly ; " to say the truth, it would have been a job, my good friend. *Les politesses exigent*, you know ; and, frankly, I suspect Lady St. R., my good sister, would have made a difficulty *now*."

" What do you mean," said Severne, furiously, and coming over from the window ; " what do you mean by *that*, Lord John Raby ? "

"What do I mean?" said the other, looking round and laughing; "odds, bullets, and triggers! This looks wicked and bloody. 'Pon my word, my friend, you have a rustic way of putting questions. I give you my word, if you had cocked your hat that way, and looked so at my friend Peltier, he'd have had you out at the 'Bois,' and his knitting-needle through you *here*"—his lordship laid his finger on the lowest button of his waistcoat—"before you could say 'Lord deliver me!' I know what you *thought* I meant, and not unnatural, too. No; Lady St. Ryder sticks at giving cards, she is so drenched with the country vermin, who swarm upon her whenever they hear of a thing going on. I believe they get a second-hand 'Morning Post' down on purpose."

"Miss Palmer," said Severne, "*would* you come in here a moment? I want just *one* word——"

"Go, dear," said Lord John, "you and I will have our talk afterwards. 'Pon my word, Mrs. P., he has you all in good order here."

Severne said nothing, but walked away into the next room. Miss Palmer rose to follow.

"Now don't be appealing to me," said Lord John, laughing heartily; "I can do nothing for you; you had better go and have it over; that's *my* advice."

"Look here," said Severne to her hurriedly, "I see what all this is coming to; however, that's no matter; I say nothing of it; only one *last* thing I may earnestly beseech of you—shun that man in the next room—keep clear of him. I say this for your own sake; I am even surprised that *you* should require such a warning. But nothing should surprise me now-a-days."

"And many things are beginning to surprise *me* lately. Why should you think *I* wish him to be here?"

"Because I have eyes to see and ears to hear. It has wounded me deeply—I did not expect it from you—even what I saw within the last minute. But, of course, *you* are not to be different from the rest?"

"This is a strange way to speak to me," she said, a little excited; "you have been worried or troubled with something, I suppose?"

"Ah, you have picked that up, too," he said bitterly; "but I am not so reduced as you would make me, and have my honest independence of mind left; and I shall speak plainly, Miss Palmer. I don't approve of your seeing that man, or letting him in here. I was shocked, indeed, to see you come in after parading the town with him."

"Parading the town!" she said, quickly.

"Too fine a word, perhaps. Then were you, or were you not, pray?"

"I shall not answer these questions," she said, almost defiantly; "you should know me better. I am the best judge of my own conduct—at least mamma is."

"Let me finish, then," said he, calmly; "and I am very glad we are putting things on this footing. Indeed, she has explained your *new* views to me already. I do not approve—and distinctly object to your appearing at this party, or

being brought there under the wing of that man."

"I can say nothing; I can only do what mamma approves and directs. You will think of this later more calmly."

"Never," he answered. "You treat this lightly; I don't, I can tell you. It is a very serious matter—but do as you please. Take what course you please; I have merely said what my poor notions of propriety dictate. I know," he added, vehemently, "that *any* girl that gave herself over to find pleasure in the society of a man of *that* description, or could bring herself to accept compliments from him, *I* should look on as—as—*degraded*—yes, degraded! Of course, this is only *my* absurd notion, which you may mind or not, as you please."

She had an impetuous temper; as impetuous as his.

"This is kind and generous! These seem like *orders*," she said. "You leave one no choice; you have no trust in one's own guiding principle; but no matter—we shall see."

"Is that all you say—is that what you tell me?" he said, with a quivering lip.

"We shall see," she said, calmly, and turned away. "And—you shall see."

He paced down the street furiously, and saying to himself, bitterly, "All the same! all the same!" The events of the day—annoyances accumulated one on the other, had fretted him till he was all but in a fever of worry and trouble. Some allowance might reasonably be made for him, for hitherto he had found life but a pleasant garden, with smooth walks, in which it was rather "a bore" to stroll, but where there was at least no inconvenience. Now, he had been suddenly thrust out upon the rude high road, and found his feet cut with the sharp broken stones, and his chest searched through and through by cold east winds, and was shouldered and bullied by every low tramp he met. It was a great change.

In this mood, just as he reached the top of the street, he felt some one's hand on his arm. It was his friend Selby, whose face was looking

wistfully into his, with the deepest sympathy and compassion.

"My dear boy," he said, "I have been looking for you, and wanting to see you. I have been at your place, and should have been before, only for——"

"Make no excuses, my dear friend," said the other, with a forced laugh. "Why should *you* more than any one else? I am very glad to see you, all the same."

"I was so—so sorry," the other went on in the same tone of deep sympathy, "to hear of all this. It came on me like a——"

"Well, now," said Severne, "do let us have done with it, for God's sake. Everyone to-day has been coming to me with long faces, and condolences. I am not in a workhouse yet, as you see. So let us leave it there, and talk of something else. How are you getting on yourself?"

"But *I want* to talk of this," said the other, putting his arm in Severne's, and walking along with him. "You know me so long, and we were at school together, so my speaking to you isn't

like anyone else's. Now, I have heard all about this, and, in fact," he added, confidentially, "I just came up to Payne's only a minute after you had left, and——"

Severne shook his arm free. "This is growing unendurable. Are you all in a conspiracy to ring the changes on *that*? So *you* made one of the gang at that place, to talk over and publish what has befallen an unfortunate man. Yes, and degrade me before those heartless fellows. I am sick of it;" and he turned to go, leaving his friend stupefied, with a deeply wounded look on his face. Then he turned back on a sudden, and put his hand out. "Forgive me, my dear fellow," he said; "but I don't know what I am doing or saying. I don't mean it, indeed. But I have been so worried and *hunted*, I don't know where to turn to, or where to look to. God help me."

The other was as troubled as he was. "Come, come," he said, "don't be cast down. You have plenty of friends. I know you have me, who would do anything for you. And I must speak plainly to you, though I may offend you. Now,

this business of Payne's—you know what wretches they are—if you would let *me*——”

Severne's brow contracted. Selby, of all people in the world, was the man he had counselled, lectured, and given the advice to of a man of the world, against improvidence, &c.

“Now,” said he, “I can't have anything of that sort. I want nothing from any man. I can fight my own way. I want at least to keep my self-respect, and not be degraded. So now, my dear friend, unless you want to have done with *me* altogether, like the rest of the world, please not a word on that subject. I don't want to quarrel with *you*. But you understand me by this time. Don't you see I am greatly obliged to you, all the same. But things are not *quite* so bad with me. Here, cab! You see I can afford myself a hansom. Good-bye.”

He jumped into the cab that came up, and drove away, waving his hand to his friend. Perhaps he was a little pleased at first, for he might have thought he had done better that way. But as he lay back, the sense of his wretchedness

and that worse feeling than wretchedness—of being “hunted” and persecuted, he said the word to himself very often, with the addition of a “God help me!”

CHAPTER VII.

A STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

IN the front bedroom at Brooke-street, the patient was not mending. The friendly doctor came often and pondered over "the case," yet could make nothing of it. "He does not mend," he said, "and he ought to do so; his injuries were not, after all, of that serious kind; he is strong, and comparatively a young man."

This he said in the drawing-room, in presence of his young daughter and Mrs. Lepell, who attended most scrupulously on every occasion to hear his opinion, and to recompense it suitably. She never liked this medical attendant. She often said what folly it was having an obscure man of that sort—a rough, rude fellow, too—when they might have the best advice in town for the same money. But at the proposal to

dismiss the doctor, the patient fell into such misery and alarm, and the proceeding was so opposed by his young daughter, that Mrs. Lepell, with excellent discretion, always gave up the point.

Indeed it was a sacrifice on her part, as, it must be said, the doctor's behaviour to her was anything but cordial, and scarcely respectful. As he gave his opinion his eyes would rest on her with meaning.

"My good friend," he would say to the patient, "what you want is what neither I nor any man in the world can do for you—you must make a struggle and rouse yourself; shake off this depression. I suppose *you* can have nothing on your mind; if you have, you know that is all beyond *my* skill. I tell you plainly it is no use my coming this way day after day. Take my advice, put away from you all depressing thoughts for the present; let them come back when you are well and strong enough to entertain them. Come, now!"

The only answer to this appeal was a faint smile and a deep sigh—so deep, that it seemed

he was struggling to raise a weight off his chest. The smile was for the face of the young girl beside him, and whose hand he held all the time.

"I repeat," the doctor said one afternoon in the drawing-room, "I don't see my way here. The man is under some deep load of depression; he wants cheering, constant cheering, the cheering of kind and affectionate faces always round his bed, kind and soothing words, a constant encouragement. Why, a little of this," he added, "would be worth a cartload of all the drugs I could send him."

"It is most unfortunate," said Mrs. Lepell, calmly, "that we cannot do all that. We are only two women here, and cannot multiply ourselves into a whole circle of the affectionate faces and speeches you mention."

"Ah," said the doctor, "*one* face, ma'am, and one look of sincere interest would be as good as a dozen."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Lepell; "but are you finding fault with *his* daughter—my step-daugh-

ter? Do you mean that *she* is unfilial, or neglects her duty?"

"*Indeed* I do not," said the doctor warmly; "if it rested with her devotion and love, he should have been well months ago."

Mrs. Lepell shrugged her shoulders.

"It is very hard to follow," she said. "Once you travel out of your strict line, you lead us all into confusion; so, if you please, we will keep strictly to *that*. What prescription do you give to-day?"

"As you ask I shall tell you," said the doctor, suddenly; "and I was only thinking of it last night; I think if he got a change—a change of place, scene, and persons——"

"Change of air?" said she. "Why, I asked you that at the very beginning—before we were settled a week here. You appear uncertain, indeed, in your views."

"Perhaps I am," said the doctor, trying to keep calm. "But circumstances alter. What I propose now is, that he should go down to some quiet bracing, sheltered corner on the sea—

away from town. I have a treasure of a friend—a Doctor Cameron—under whose care we could put him. He is down in the brougham at this moment. A month or six weeks would set him up."

"You seem to think we are people of vast fortune," said she, "which we are not, to carry on our illnesses in this magnificent way. How are we to rely on this cure? Perhaps when we get there you may send him back to town. We are poor people, I assure you, and cannot afford money to help our doctor to make experiments."

"O, *that's* the difficulty," said he, "economy—then I can settle that. I have thought of all that. I have a little box of my own on the coast—a charming little place to which I sometimes run down myself. We will bring him down at once."

"Very kind, indeed," said she, "but we have no wish to be indebted to you for such hospitality."

"Quite right," said the doctor, "there again we agree; you and I are not great friends,

ma'am, that's pretty well known. So I like your independence in not wishing to be under a compliment to me. No! You stay here to take care of the house, pay the visits, look after the parties, &c., while I and Miss Lepell carry him between us—to bring him back at the end of six weeks or two months at furthest, sound as a roach—come, do you agree?”

She coloured and looked at the doctor.

“A charming programme. So part of your care is leaving me behind?”

“Well,” said the other, smiling, “as you ask me, why I may as well confess, that, perhaps it is.”

“This is all charmingly complimentary,” she said. “Well, I shall speak as plainly to you as you do to me. I think your proposal has quite exceeded the bounds of professional freedom. I think you have forgotten yourself, and have spoken freely and improperly to a lady whose husband you are attending. What do you insinuate, sir?” she added, her colour rising, and giving a short stamp; “what is the meaning of

these speeches and hints you have been throwing out this month past! You are too free, sir," she went on, raising her voice, "and I have borne with it too long. What do you mean? Say out openly what you mean. I am not afraid—say it as publicly as you like—when and where you please. Now, sir!"

She stood before him glowing, haughty, defiant, angry, and injured. After all it might be said she was strictly in her right, and so it would appear to the doctor when he got home and could think it over coolly; she was mistress and administrator of that house, and he had no business to force himself in there, in defiance of her wish. But he was a warm-tempered man himself when roused and *when put in the wrong*, so he answered as defiantly.

"I am your husband's physician. It was *he* who sent for me! No, no, my dear madam," he said, regaining his coolness, "let us not go on like children. You are very clever, indeed too clever; I must say so; but still I see what I see—and I know you perfectly."

"You do not, Doctor Pinkerton, as you shall find. Would you wait here a moment, please?"

"O, certainly," he said.

She flew out of the room, and left him, smiling to himself, and pulling his whiskers before the glass.

"Checkmated," he half murmured to himself.

"Ah! I should have been a lawyer."

She was not long away, but came "rustling" down with fresh elation.

"I was determined," she said, "to bring all this to an issue at once. It is far better. My husband—as I knew he would—takes his wife's part—and regrets that he is obliged to dispense with your further services, and begs you will not attend here any more."

"This is more of the comedy," he said, in a passion. "Then I don't accept that. I know what all this means. *My friend send me away!* No, indeed."

"Here is his daughter," she said. "I can fortunately meet you at every point of this

matter. *You* will tell this [gentleman," she went on; "does your father wish this gentleman not to return? Tell him please, in your words."

With a sort of piteous and mournful face, the young girl faltered out,—

"Yes, he said so."

"I understand it all now," said the Doctor, who never relished being defeated at any point. "I know you *now*, Mrs. Lepell, and what you are doing; but take care—I shall watch. Indeed do not think you have the right to do this. I am friend as well as physician; and let me see if any one *dare* prevent me paying a visit to my friend. Now, let us try that."

"A husband sick in his bed, and two ladies here unprotected, to address us this language," said she, her cheeks glowing. She did not want for spirit, and, it must be repeated once more, had right on her side. It was her own house.

"Not wholly unprotected," said a voice behind—the voice of a gentleman—that made both start.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND TO THE RESCUE.

THE servant was standing at the door, and was about to announce "Mr. Severne." It was like a scene in a play—every one standing looking at each other amazed; for even in Mrs. Lepell's flushed face could be read excitement and dramatic action.

"You wish this gentleman to retire," said Severne, "as far as I can see. I have heard what he said. Let me suggest to you, sir, the propriety of doing so at once."

"You misapprehend," said the other. "I am Mr. Lepell's physician, and have just paid my visit. I have no reason for remaining."

"But I wish him never to come here again," said she, still in excitement—"O never! I cannot listen to his insinuations; his visits are

one succession of insults ; and he says he will return here in defiance of me and of my husband's orders."

"Not of his," said the doctor, growing excited himself. "Don't say that ; I should like to see *him* dismiss me."

"I am so glad you have come in," she went on, in a low aside to Severne—"O ! so glad to see you once more. It seems as if Providence had sent you. This man is cowed already."

Severne always prided himself on his "tact." He went up to the doctor.

"You are a man of the world," he said, "at least you should be, from your profession. You can't do this. No man can force himself in where he is not required. I dare say you have a most respectable round of practice—indeed I have often heard your name ; so take advice now, and join your friend below."

The doctor was at the door.

"Good morning," he said. "I suppose I must not struggle with a lady. However, I was going before this gentleman entered. As for the future

I say nothing. I shall know how to watch over my friend. I shall contrive some way. Good-day. Miss Lepell, might I speak to you ? ”

The young girl flew to him.

Mrs. Lepell looked from her to Severne, significantly.

“ You see what is the way,” she said, hopelessly. “ I am alone in this house, mistress as I *appear* to be of it. All my little battles I must fight single-handed. And indeed it is bad enough—the common, daily, weary struggle; but when it comes to battling with creatures like *that*—when men come into your house and threaten and bully, as you saw now, then my heart sinks. What would have happened presently I know not. You—*you* saved me! Oh,” she added, changing her voice into a lower and more earnest tone, “ I am so glad of this. I have been looking out, wondering, hoping that *perhaps* you might not have forgotten me.”

“ My goodness,” said Severne, a little impatiently—“ my dear Mrs. Lepell, do you suppose that I have not had my troubles too? Oh,

of course they have told you. I am sick to death. I have no time to think of friends or visits. Indeed I don't know what brought me in here now."

"An inspiration," she said; "most likely that. You were kind to me before—oh, so kind at—at—that place."

"No, indeed," said he, heartily—"not at all. Indeed I often reproached myself, for I had a sort of feeling about you—but only at first."

"*Indeed* you were," she went on—"only too kind to me. That time was a little break; it took off my thoughts. *Now* you see me back again in the old groove."

"We are all in our grooves again; I am in quite a new one," he said, bitterly. "Of course you have heard?—not even with the smooth comfort of a groove. Such a *time* as I have had of it; you that saw me at *that* place, you couldn't imagine it. I might be some common Pariah, running through the streets, hunted with sticks and stones. And then you—talking of troubles, and a doctor that won't go away!—ha,

ha!—and a fine house over your head. Why, all the world has taken to persecuting me.”

With a look of almost piteous sympathy she half murmured—

“ This is only the lot of us all. Which of us escapes ? ”

“ Ah, that is very well in the pulpit,” said Severne; “ but, take me, why should I be persecuted? One thing on top of the other—every day some new trial, some fresh blow. I wonder how I bear it—upon my soul, I do. Only yesterday that low, stuck-up, insufferable parvenu, the new heir, Sir Parker Digby, comes with his demands; he wants this and that which he is entitled to. What was I entitled to? I always told Sir John what he was—a mean, miserable hound. Turned us out on a day’s notice—and when I proposed to him delay, and stated very calmly to him the way I was in, and asked him what he could do for me,—which I had a *right* to ask him, mind—if you only saw the lump of ice, the stick of ice, he changed into! I could have killed myself for doing such a thing; I ought to

have known what he was. However, all I hope is, that it will all come at once and together, and let me have done with it, for I am sick at heart—I am, indeed—and want to have done with it.”

Mrs. Lepell’s eyes swam with a kindly sympathy.

“Heaven knows,” she said, “I wish I could be of use to you in some way. And how good of you to come in to me and talk to me. And now, do you know what I am going to say?—something very forward and free, and even impertinent—at least you will think it so, for I have no right to do so; but——”

She was so very dejected, and had such an humble downcast air of contrition in advance, that Severne’s heart smote him, and he could not but smile.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said; “say anything you like.”

“Well, what I mean is this,” she said, in greater embarrassment, “I feel I could *never* do enough for *you*, and I have heard that you, like

all young men of fashion and rank, are, and *ought* to be, in want of—in want of——”

She lifted her eyes and looked into his with fresh timidity.

He shook his head quickly.

“Ah,” she said, quickly, and covering up her face with her hands. “There, I have done it. I knew it; always something stupid.”

“Not at all,” said he, gravely, “I am not at all angry. I understand you perfectly. I suppose a little hoard up-stairs. I am sincerely obliged to you; I am indeed. I can’t tell you how refreshing this little warmth of sunlight comes upon me after all the ingratitude and unkindness I have met with on *all* sides. I won’t forget it in a hurry, indeed I will not. *You* have held to me, and to say the truth, I did not count on you. But then I have been wrong all through.”

“O what kind words,” she said; “I shall think of these when I’m alone, indeed I shall. But now let me go back; just hear me, and give me leave to speak.”

"About what?" said he, smiling.

"About *that*—and I must do it," she went on, very quickly. "It is a little hoard, and of very fair size; contemptible to *you*, of course, just some hundred pounds or so. We could, with a little squeezing, bring it up to five hundred, I am *sure* I could. A bagatelle, but it might be of use for a bill—a tailor—I mean a boot-maker—or a——"

"A tailor?" said Serverne, colouring, "how do you mean?" Then recovering himself, "Indeed this is kindness, and I *did* not expect it. I declare the world is better than I thought. But, my dear Mrs. Lepell, it is altogether impossible. Not to be thought of. I have something here," he said, touching his head, "that will help *me* yet."

"Ah, indeed you have," said she, with enthusiasm. "I know *that*, and that is my security. I believe in your star, I do indeed. You will be great and above us all. I am as convinced of that as that I sit here. You will be rich, have titles, estates, and then perhaps you will remem-

ber the old friend that admired you so, and believed in you."

This was spoken with such enthusiasm, that he turned to look at her. Her face was glowing with colour, her eyes sparkling. Here was a bit of nature, as he said later, that was refreshing and even comforting.

"I have something of the same confidence myself," he said; "I have indeed. But why should you——"

"Mark my words," she said, "they will come true, and very soon perhaps. But you refuse me?"

"Ah, yes, I do," he said, rising; "but you are sending me away quite light-hearted and happy. But I shall come very often—very often. I promise I shall look on myself as a sort of special constable to protect you against intrusive doctors and such like. If you want me at any time—at *any* time—mind, send."

"What goodness!" said Mrs. Lepell. "O what kindness! And now, let me ask *one* question about *her*, that charming looking creature."

“O,” said Severne, hastily, “*she is perfectly well and happy.* You recollect what I said a few moments ago about the world. Why should any one be different from the rest of the world? No, no, she is quite right. Good-bye, good-bye, my dear Mrs. Lepell, I shall *never* forget your conduct to-day.”

As he went out leaving her with flushed cheek and sparkling eye, Miss Lepell was standing at the door, coming in. She had heard this last speech, looked with distress and surprise from the handsome young man to her stepmother’s excited face, and a look of distress and doubt passed across her face. Severne bowed to her magnificently, and “like a gentleman,” and went his way.

Sometimes Mrs. Lepell went out to drive in a chartered brougham “to pay visits.” Poor lady, her list was a very short one. Still there was the drive, and there were Mr. Lepell’s old friends, whom she said she would not allow to be “dropped,” for the sake of his daughter. Old friends were slack in acknowledging warmly

her civilities. But she was very persevering. She dressed on this occasion, and went to her husband's bedside in a charming little "cap of a bonnet," that seemed like the down on a meadow flower, so that you might blow away all the laces and furbelows. It was bent over him.

"I have ordered the brougham," she said, "to go out and pay our visits. Besides, I think *my health* requires a little fresh air. Would you direct your daughter that she must come too? I know what things will be said," she added, smiling, "if I am seen in the Park by myself, luxuriously enjoying my drive. I can't afford to be set down as *the cruel* stepmother."

"Certainly, certainly," said the invalid, feebly and hastily. "To be sure. It is quite proper, and it will do her good. Tell her from me——"

"No, no," said Mrs. Lepell, over at the glass, and arranging the "crown" of her bonnet; "I find that won't do. We must have chapter and verse. Nothing on hearsay, it seems——"

The daughter came, with that wistful look of

distress and doubt in her face which was now become all but habitual.

“What is it, papa?” she said, laying her face close to his.

“You will go out and drive with mamma,” he said, hurriedly, “and dress yourself, and do what she says; she is quite willing you should be *seen*—and go—do.”

“But papa——”

The round eye of Mrs. Lepell was looking in the glass, and resting coldly on his face. He saw hers in the glass from his pillow.

“Go, go,” he said, wearily; “why won’t you do what I ask—always this coming to me. There—I *wish* it. It is very undutiful.”

Mrs. Lepell smiled in the glass, and settled a flower. The young girl put her face close, and pressed her lips on his forehead. Then the assumed testiness of his manner all passed away—the light of a yearning affection, tinged with melancholy and grief, came into his eyes, and with a sort of fervour he returned her kiss; then coloured, guiltily; for Mrs. Lepell, turning from

the glass, impatient at these formalities, rustled from the room.

When the young girl came down dressed, and she had a fine gossamer bonnet also, she heard voices in the drawing-room. A hansom cab was at the door. There had been quite a series of gentlemen there that day. She went up again, half way, and in a moment a young man came out, very eager, and talking in a half-suppressed voice.

"That is all right, dear Mrs. Lepell. You could do no more; you did your best, and it was most kind of you. We must only try to help him in some other way."

"Yes, yes;" then there was a confidential muttering and whispering, and he went back.

"I'll come again to-morrow or next day, and we shall talk it over."

Mrs. Lepell was in great spirits that evening during the drive in the chartered brougham. Her fresh, round, rosy face contrasted favourably with the pensive, mournful one beside her. *She* smiled and talked as though she was carrying on

a conversation. Many an old lord and colonel walked back a little for a better view, with a "Who the deuce is *that* now?" After an hour or so of this promenading *en voiture*, she gave a sigh, and then letting down the glass, said softly to the coachman,—

"Would you drive to Sir Parker Digby's?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW OWNER.

SIR PARKER DIGBY, the new baronet, lived in a little, shy, and rather mean house in one of the streets about Eaton Square. There he maintained the new Lady Digby, and the Misses Digby in poor state—the son and future baronet was away with his regiment. A meanness and stinginess almost amounting to privation, combined with an ostentatious pretence, marked that household. Lady Digby came of a noble family, yet escaped the adornment of either “honourable” or “lady,” for the noble family being straitened in means, was also fighting the battle of show and genteel appearance. Of all the vulgarities with which our social system is dotted over—like flaming bows of gaudy ribbon upon the foolish housemaid dressed out for a holiday—this is

about the meanest and most vulgar. The very house in which the Digbys lived was truly symbolical of what was within ; for it was all over plaster, except at the side, which looked into a lane, where it was suddenly cut off, and the native bricks exposed.

Sir Parker was all cold, and stiff, and dry, like one long bone. Through his dreary cells flowed a thin, watery, uncomfortable fluid, which was not the usual blood. In Lady Digby was exhibited not merely a rich abundance of the ordinary generous stream, but vast masses of material no less generously developed—she being a large, coarse, stout woman, with an arrogant presence, a fierce and overbearing temper, and a pride that despised everything that was “poor.” Next to poverty she contemned what was “low,” but lowness could be redeemed by wealth. In only two things were she and her cold husband agreed—the pretence of show and the reality of nearness and stinginess. Once or twice in the year a dinner party was given to a few chosen “swells,” selected with infinite pains, whose

entertainment was made more unfailing by laborious arts. The swells who came—a lord this—a bishop of that—a cheap dining-out secretary, with a ribbon—saw a good dinner “well done,” pretty much such as they saw four times in the week; but they did not see the shabby work that had gone on behind the sham plaster of the house. They did not know—and would not believe if they were told—how the owner and his lady descended to strange and almost menial offices—what a deal of what they saw was the handiwork of their hosts—what unworthy haggling and chaffering over a shilling went on with the very waiters who were “got in,” and who, after solemn agreement, were, on some pettifogging pretext, “beaten down” yet further. For Lady Digby was excellently suited to this office, and, when the occasion served, had rude violent language at command, quite in keeping. There were little artifices about the wine—the confidential servant of the house being let into the secret of a select and marked bottle for the Bishop and Cabinet Minister, with cautions, too,

about fillings and helpings. As for the young officer or two, it was no concern what quality they got or how little of that quality. One of these gentlemen—a fellow “that could see before him,” and of an observing turn, vastly amused his comrades at mess with an account of what he saw on one of these occasions. “I protest,” he said, “there weren’t bits a piece, and I had to go to the club and dine over again. Jove! I think they got the painted legs of mutton from the pantomime. And I declare I caught one of the fellows slily going round and collecting all the bills of fare, to do again, you know; but I was even with them, and took mine up under the table; and the fellow came and poked about, and at last *asked me for it!* He did, on my soul; ha, ha!”

When they became Sir Parker and Lady Digby, nothing was changed. Their hearts were in the old system. The new place and new estate—they told their friends—“would bring God knows what end of expense on us. They would have to look to every shilling *now* more than ever.” But the sorest struggle was over the

matter of his place. For nearly five hundred a year was to be given up, and, as Sir Parker said, he had only six or seven years to run to put in his full time and retire on a pension. But the pressure from above and below—the sneers and jests in the office when Sir Parker was “feeling his way,” was a little too much. Every one said: “Of course *you* cut the office now; a shabby few hundreds is nothing to *you*, Sir Parker,” and he accordingly, with a sort of rueful reluctance, sent in his resignation.

The affairs of the new succession greatly engrossed him. On investigation it was found that it was a greater property than any one had supposed. Sir John had managed it in true old-fashioned stand-still notions, with a caution which was merely loss of money. There were mines on the estate, a perfect source of wealth, for which offers had been made by companies, but which were refused haughtily, as if an insult had been received. Sir Parker was alive to all these splendid advantages. The company was already offering *him*; he was not old fashioned.

Thousands and thousands a year would come in with the mine ; after the mine a seat for the borough, or perhaps the county ; and after the seat, a barony ; for their party would be in surely by that time, and he really had claims on the county. For in his office, by acting on commissions, and "cutting down" needy clerks, whose only purpose in life was to rob the county of some eighty or ninety pounds a year, to breed up swarming families, he had established claims upon his grateful country, and it was to be hoped more grateful ministry.

Dreaming on this pleasant prospect, and at the same time turning over the papers of the late baronet, Sir Parker came upon a little bundle tied up in a very orderly way, and which he opened with great nicety. (He really delighted in this work, and it had become a sort of substitute for that dear lost labour at the Office which he had sacrificed, and would ever regret that he had sacrificed.) He found this to be a bond for £500, prepared in the regular way from Severne to the late Sir John Digby. This he

duly noted and put aside, to be handed to his solicitor; and a little later Severne received formal application from that officer for its satisfaction. This was a little hobby of Sir John's. "I shan't give young fellows a habit of dependence. I am quite ready to help the lad in reason; but he will respect himself all the more for not being under a compliment. No, sir; we shall do it all in the regular course, and you shall pay me a trifle of interest; and as for the bond, you won't find me a pressing creditor—if you are regular, that is."

There were other legacies, too, under this old will, and a good deal of ready money to be got together to discharge them; and Sir Parker, who had no idea but that every man must pay his debts in the regular course, and take up his bonds, so long at least as he considered himself respectable, dismissed the matter from his mind; and in his little schedule, which he totted up and made out with true official nicety a great many times in the day, set down "£500" as available assets for distribution.

It was this application that had brought Severne to his house, and has caused that bitter description which Severne had given to Mrs. Lepell.

"You surely cannot be serious," he said, "in this demand. It is simply ludicrous. When I tell you," he added with calmness, "that this was a mere fiction—a good-natured bit of form on Sir John's side, to encourage self-reliance, as he called it."

"A most proper idea," said the other, coldly. "We should all try and cultivate that. But you see, here is your bond—that is to say, at Mr. Sawyer's office—regularly signed, sealed, and made out. In the face of that, what are we to do?"

"I tell you," said Severne, impatiently, "it is a fiction. It was never meant to be recovered. Why poor Sir John—he would start from his grave, if he dreamed of its getting into an attorney's hands. He *might* not have wished to help me in any *other* way—so it proved, indeed—but he certainly did not wish to injure me."

"Oh, that is all quite beside the matter," said Sir Parker, coolly, "among men of business, you know. Any one could make that excuse when called on to meet their engagements."

"Do you doubt my word?" said Severne, trembling. "Do you dare to insinuate that I am not telling the truth?"

"Oh I must beg—I must really request you will not take this tone. Much better go to Mr. Sawyer. He is in his office daily from two to three. Indeed I don't know why you should come to me."

"Indeed I don't know either," said the other, bitterly. "I might well know what to expect. A fine prospect for poor Digby and its estates. Then I can tell you, Sir John would have *died* sooner than he would have had it come to you. I have heard him say so a thousand times. A fine oppressor the poor tenantry will have. Even from the moment you came there, as I have heard, *even to a woman*, you must show your ungraciousness. But nothing more could be expected."

"I can understand all this," said Sir Parker, turning the colour of one of his favourite parchments; "it is very easy to see what it springs from. I can excuse you too, Mr. Severne. Most natural."

"Nothing of the kind," said the other, indignantly. "Such motives naturally suggest themselves to your mind. But I ask you again, have you no sense of decency or restraint, that you—*you* have been undeservedly blessed, not by Providence, for it was only a lucky accident!—can be so greedy and grasping, that——"

"Now," said Sir Parker, rising, "I can really hear no more of this. You must go—er—away. Please do, or I shall be obliged to ring for somebody. In future let *your* man of business see *mine*, Mr. Sawyer. If indeed you will make some sort of apology for the outrageous language you have used to-day, I dare say he can make out some little delay, just before matters are wound up finally. He will tell you, what you ought to know as a—er—legal person—that I am powerless, and have to collect these assets, and

account for them, or pay myself. I am *not* prepared to do this for Mr. Severne or any one. As for the story about a fiction and all that, it is simply ludicrous, and no sane man could entertain it."

After this speech, it was no wonder that Severne came away chafing, or gave such an account to Mrs. Lepell. The unhappy young man indeed wanted all sympathy, and his difficulties were indeed serious and menacing. He was bitter and sarcastic in this scene, as a picture of human nature.

"*There is a man,*" he said, "that might at this moment, and but for an accident, be behind a desk or a counter, and would be so all through his life! A little prosperity has brought out *all the meanness* of his heart." On the other hand, Sir Parker told his friends at the club. "Such a business! The fellow burst in on me, and used the most outrageous language. Really, only that he is one of the family, why one might have thought of the police, or something of that kind. Sir John was perfectly right in *marking*

him as he did. I am not bound to keep terms with such an ill-conditioned bear as that. And he shall find that things shall take their course."

And accordingly Mr. Sawyer received general instructions "to collect" all the assets of the estates, and "get in all debts owing to the personalty" without delay.

CHAPTER X.

THE SICK MAN.

ARRIVED at the Digbys' small and attenuated house, Mrs. Lepell was told that Lady Digby was at home. This information came from a cheap and rather hungry-looking servant, whom the malicious vowed had been taken from a work-house, on easy and gratuitous terms.

"I can wait for you," said the young girl to her stepmother, "in the carriage."

"But you must come in," said Mrs. Lepell, "really you must. *It is for you*, and for your papa that I am paying these visits. O, please—I must beg——"

The mournful young face grew more mournful still, but followed. The two ladies went upstairs. Could we say that Mrs. Lepell was not nervous, and did not feel her heart go pit-a-pat? for this

ceremonial was new to her, and she heard female voices in fashionable clatter.

The little room was indeed half full; for this was Lady Digby's "day"—her Monday or Thursday, it is hard to remember. Those receptions were indeed not crowded. Even the cold and fashionable shrank from the house. They were having tea, let it be said, the best, finest, and most costly, for there was no stinginess where show was concerned—but then, it was said that "it was pulled up" somewhere else. There was an important personage present—Miss Storer, a lady whose brother's wife was "the Hon. Mrs. Storer," and who by desperate efforts had been reached somehow. When the next dinner came round, Sir Parker would lead in that lady with triumph; there was also present a Mrs. Black, not very highly distinguished in the polite world, yet still mysteriously welcomed at the desirable houses. Plenty of such people are wandering about, whose passports and credentials are never asked for, but which, if zealously scrutinised by the *gens d'armes* of

society, would be found out "of rule." About every great family flutter such obscure genteel people—a major, or a Madame "Chose," securely established, no man knows why. How is it that even in those Courts to which we all lift our eyes with such vast reverence, the more confidential familiars are mostly persons of simple degree—simple esquires, and even persons of humble extraction?

Lady Digby came forward to meet her visitor. She had not very distinctly heard the name which the cheap man-servant had announced. It sounded like "Wells"—and there were people of that name, of distinction, who, she had a faint hope, would call one day. She was gracious and affable, and obsequious at the same time. Mrs. Lepell, it must be said, had come up with a little nervousness, but she was now quite re-assured. Let it also be said that she was very clever, and was "picking up" skill in her new profession of married lady very fast. She talked very pleasantly and gaily, yet with a modest deference which never deserted her, and which she deter-

mined *never should, so long as she lived*—for was it not the best course, as aid either to conciliation or popularity?

“This is your daughter?” said Lady Digby, glowing with a sort of oily satisfaction, “a charming girl!”

“Scarcely my daughter, Lady Digby,” said Mrs. Lepell, smiling. “No; she is Mr. Lepell’s,—by his first wife,” added she, with natural modesty and a little confusion.

“Mr. who?” said Lady Digby, starting, “who did you say?”

“Mr. Lepell,” said the other, sweetly. “Sir Parker Digby met us down at Digby during that unfortunate business. Poor dear Sir John, he treated me like his child.”

“*You, ma’am,*” said Lady Digby, colouring, and speaking in a low voice; “so *you* are that person? and what do you come here for? pray how are we indebted to you for this honour? I don’t know you—I really don’t—I don’t understand this;” and Lady Digby glowing, panting, and growing more raw and crimson every

moment, moved back and forwards on her chair, and rustled her stiff coarse silk dress.

Mrs. Lepell looked at her in amazement. Only the lady next to Lady Digby heard well what was going on.

"I really am at a loss to understand," went on the lady, "after what has happened too! And the way you behaved at that place."

The lady whose brother's wife was "the Hon. Mrs. Storer" looked on amazed.

Mrs. Lepell rose gently to go away. "Come, dear," she said to *her daughter*; "I am *afraid* we have made a mistake—the number, or the street, perhaps. Ah, here is Sir Parker!"

It was that gentleman who peered in with a sort of uneasy glance; but the moment he saw Mrs. Lepell he closed the door quickly. It was a most singular scene, as the ladies present thought. Lady Digby rang the bell. The young girl, colouring, and ready to sink with confusion—for she saw and understood all—could not move from shame and humiliation. Mrs. Lepell alone was at ease, and managed her retreat with-

out confusion. "Such mistakes will occur," she said. "I am so sorry to have disturbed you. I don't know how it happened either. My stupidity, I suppose; many, many apologies for intruding. These things will happen; and yet, I assure you, it is scarcely my fault; for when I was down at Digby—but that is no matter now. Good-morning. Come, dear."

She bowed all round, and retired with great ease. Not so "her daughter," for that gentle child was ready to sink with shame and confusion. Lady Digby's face glowed again on this victory. When the enemy was gone, she told the Hon. Mrs. Storer's sister-in-law the story. This was some intriguing creature "with a husband that poor Sir John, who was a little weak in that way, had picked up out of a railway." A most dangerous class, that would fasten on you, and who had behaved with the greatest effrontery to Sir Parker—tried to threaten—and only Sir Parker knew how to deal with *her class*, she might have given a great deal of trouble.

This picture struck a sort of horror into the

assembled women. There is nothing, as we all know, more terrible than that vague description, "person of her class," "creature," and the like, which presents the idea of contagion, and makes all sound, respectable persons fly in confusion. The ladies' curiosity becoming inflamed by such allusion, was gratified with more details, and over their tea revelled in the picture of these dangerous details, which, it may be added, they later sent abroad very much in the same way they had received it.

But the victim of these calumnies moved softly downstairs without a plume being ruffled. Just in the hall, where the cheap man-servant was coming to the door, she stopped.

"Sir Parker in?" she asked, softly; "I wish to speak with him for a moment."

"He's gone out, ma'am," the cheap man-servant answered, hurriedly; "gone out to the club."

"So this is the study?" said Mrs. Lepell, as if she had now seen such a thing for the first time; "this is where he sits and works—works

so hard all the day long?" And the cheap man-servant heard the sound of the door-handle being turned. But it was locked on the inside; so Sir Parker *must* have been at his club. It was no wonder, after the scene with Severne, that Sir Parker should have his door fast locked. He wished to keep clear of *that* connexion, and especially of that dreadful woman who was so persevering and troublesome.

When they returned from that drive the young girl flew up to her father, as was her custom, to try and amuse him. She was struck with his restless eyes and look, more anxious than usual. She sat down beside him, and with artificial spirit told of the people they had seen in the park. Suddenly he said:—

"But those gentlemen, dear; who are they? tell me about *that*; what do they want here?"

"What gentlemen, papa?" said she, in astonishment.

"The gentlemen that were here to-day whose voices I heard; why are *they coming when I am shut up here*? what does it all mean?"

"Nothing, dearest papa," she said, soothing him. "It was only that gentleman at whose house you were—Mr. Severne."

"I suppose he came to ask after me. No doubt. How kind, and what interest to show in a broken down man. And the other, who is *he*?"

"I don't know, papa," she said, frightened. "Indeed, no. These are all friends."

"Friends indeed," he said, lifting himself up excitedly. "I see what it is all now. It is not fair; it is cruel, wicked to take advantage of a poor sick creature, broken down as I am. But I shall not be hood-winked in that way. I shall get well; and I am better. They shall not keep me shut up here while *that* wickedness goes on."

The girl looked round to the door in alarm; she was not very "sharp," naturally; but her never-ceasing affection suggested an idea to her. Was not this what the doctor had said; anything to rouse him from the listlessness and languor which had settled on him?

"Yes, papa," she said, hesitating; "it *might*

be better that you did try and see for yourself. I am only a child, and can do nothing, and know not what to do; I have no one to teach me."

"Yes, I will," he said. "I shall do all I can; it is my house after all. That good Doctor Pinkerton, when was he told to come again?"

She cast her eyes down.

"Oh, papa, he is not to come again. You sent me to tell him, you know."

"Ah, yes," he said; "I see the reason of all that *now*. He was sent away purposely—he was sent away purposely. He was too friendly, and was in the way. He would see too much. Yes, I must get up and see for myself; it is high time; and these men that were here to-day—Severne, that is the very name. Ah! it was an unlucky moment that we entered his house; though, indeed, it was *all* unlucky."

"Dearest papa," she said, alarmed at his excitement, "you think too much of all this; it was nothing; they only stayed a moment."

"Ah, but I heard what they said. She, Patty, heard. There has been some intelligence, some

understanding, for there was whispering, she says, and he talking of never forgetting her goodness. Yes, dearest, the only thing for me is to be up and watching. They shall not make a cipher of me any more. I shall begin at once. I am not so bad as they would make me out." And the invalid's eyes rolled strangely, and glittered with all the fever of ill-health. He went on. "They think—*she* thinks she has got a puppet to deal with; but I shall show them—show her—from this hour that I am not to be *their* poor helpless creature, as they think. And now, dearest child, I rely on you to tell me all that you see—*all*, mind; and from this hour I shall try and see for myself as much as I can?"

When his wife saw him again he was indeed sitting up, though scarcely able to support himself. She was greatly surprised, and perhaps rejoiced, at such a rally. Yet she also observed the new distrust in his manner, the jealous defiance, and the fashion in which his eyes followed her round the room.

"I think," she said, reasonably enough, "you

have been a little hasty, and done what is not quite prudent; you are not strong enough for this as yet."

"There are plenty," he said, "who would wish me never to be strong, who would wish to keep me helpless as long as suited their ends!"

Mrs. Lepell stopped in her walk to look at him steadily.

"These are a mere sick man's fancies," she said, shrugging her shoulders, "or I would ask you to whom you refer. No physician would approve of what you have done."

"Physician!" he said, hastily. "Ah, you have taken care of that; you have driven *him* out, as you think. But he shall come back to-morrow—the first thing."

"Yes," she said, calmly, "we shall send for the first physician in town, or for two of them, if you please, but surely not for that one who has behaved so to your wife."

"For no other. I will see no one else, or die here!"

"Ah," she said, in the same quiet manner;

“you are not so unreasonable (I suppose I may argue this with you *now*, as you say you are much better and stronger), and can scarcely wish to degrade *me* before strangers. Any one who insults me, insults you—at least that has been decided by the ordinary run of people in the case of husband and wife. I see that latterly you have taken some ideas into your head about me, but *still* let us keep up decent appearances.”

“Insult you! that is not likely. Because he is my friend, and watches over me, *that* may be insulting you. Never mind; come back he shall! I shall not be left here helpless without some one to protect me.”

“Protect you!” said she, turning on him, sharply. “These are odd phrases. What if the world heard you? Against whom, pray? Let us understand now; it is quite time. *He* held the same language. *He* must protect you, he says. So you have been talking together about this protection? What a dignified position for a wife—her own husband plotting with a stranger against her, and making these base insinuations.

Who has most cause to be injured—I or you? What is all this coming to? Can I stay in this house? Look into your own conscience before accusing me.”

As she stood there pouring out these words, with flashing eyes and certainly a just resentment, he was not able to make a reply. Some justice in what she had said struck him, and he turned his eyes upon the ground.

Suddenly Patty appeared at the door with a card in her hand. There was awe in Patty's voice, which covered the brusque and scarcely respectful manner with which she addressed her mistress—

“A gentleman's below—a lord, he says.”

“Oh, Lord John!” said Mrs. Lepell, hastily, and turned to leave the room.

Again the invalid's eyes flashed, and he half rose; then sank back wearily.

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIENDLY WARNING.

"MY dear child," said Lord John, gaily, "how are you? Here I am after hunting the whole town for you. Beating up every cover from this to Temple-bar. Mislaid your address, and asked everybody. Well, my child, and how are you getting on? How is the poor dear upstairs?"

"Not at all well, Lord John; not mending *in the least*, I am afraid."

Lord John broke into a low laugh without the least restraint. "O, uncommon good! You *are* one, my dear! But that's not the point, you know. I'll tell you what *is* the point, and what has brought me. Something for *your* good. Always the way with me, every one's good but my own. I suppose I shall reap as I sow, and

wear my crown of glory one of these fine days along with the blessed. Do get me some strong *tea* before I begin, like a dear girl."

"To be sure, Lord John," she said, rising. "It is just the hour for my own."

"Go along," said Lord John, catching at her skirt. "What are you at, child? Do you want to make me ill? Where's the cupboard? private lock and key. No stuff of *that* kind for me, if you please."

"I think I understand," said she, a little coldly. "You must let me go, please. Now I must warn you once more, Lord John, that if you come to pay me visits, you must behave with propriety, or if not, it will be very painful to tell our servants that I am never at home when a certain gay and pleasant nobleman calls. No, no; I am a respectable married lady, whose husband is ill, and all gentlemen must behave as they would to other ladies of their acquaintance."

"Stuff," said Lord John, rising sulkily, "*that's* your line, is it? I see; nothing but virtue and propriety. Do you lecture me, do you, ma'am?"

and I must behave myself as I do to other ladies? So I shall, by the Lord. For instance, I would not have taken the trouble of getting for *other ladies* the card I have in my pocket, and which I bullied my Lady St. Ryder out of. But there's no harm done, ma'am. No harm in the world. She'll be glad to have it back."

"O, Lord John," said she, "you are so good-natured, *You* know I did not mean to say anything to offend you, and——"

"There's no harm done, I say. Only I *do* hate that frozen-up propriety; and this to *me*, who know this and that and the other. Keep all that, my good child, for the soft boys whom you may have about you; but with a man like me who has three eyes in his head, and in the crook of his little finger about as much knowledge of the world as you have in that whole head of yours, it's rather too much."

"You are angry with me, I see, Lord John?"

"Not I. I am only disgusted and impatient at having good time wasted. My dear, you are no actress. *You can't* do it. Bless you, I have

seen cleverer ones than you trying that with me, and they broke down pretty soon."

"I don't want to act with any one," said she, humbly, "indeed no. But you must admit, Lord John, the more we respect ourselves, the more others will respect us."

"All! There again! Indeed it's sickening. I admit no such thing. Respect ourselves—are we writing our copy-books, ma'am? But I must go. This atmosphere don't suit me at all; my time is too precious for preaching, so I must take myself off. Good-bye to you, pious and proper lady. I'll respect you, never fear!"

"How *unkind*," said she, sinking back in her chair, "how cruel to speak so to me. What have I done? I did not mean to do anything. If you would only listen to me, Lord John; if you knew my situation in this house, when I may say I am alone—*nearly* alone, for sickness makes people strangely morbid and sensitive and suspicious. Therefore, if I am obliged to be careful for appearances' sake, even with *old friends*——"

"Old friends of a month's friendship," said

Lord John, laughing, but coming back. "How good that is, eh? Well I must say you have a kind of cleverness—though understand, for the future, you could no more match yourself against me, my dear child, than you could fly. I could just turn you round my finger, metaphorically, of course, if I laid my mind to it. Let me sip something sharp and stirring, after all this. It has given me quite a turn, to see one thought a sensible creature going on with such pranks. I am ashamed of you. If you only heard how I have spoken of you to other fellows—only last night, old Pemberton, that battered marquess, was fumbling on about some new 'clever woman,' as *he* thought. I soon shut him up. 'I know one,' I said, 'that could buy and sell the whole pack. A woman without nonsense, none of your "Unhand me, sir!" style. "You forget yourself, sir!" and that infernal rubbish. Good strong sense,' I said, 'that took everything as it was meant and gave no trouble; and as for looks,' I said, 'marquess, see here. Fancy a pair of——' Well, I won't go on, as I promised to behave.

There. But I declare the old badger began to look curious, and to prick up his ears. But I was too knowing. No name or address to be had from me, ma'am. For God's sake *will* you get me a nip of something? You know well enough, my dear, for they order such things for the sick. Now you *have* it in the house, I know. No little hypocrisies with *me*, ma'am."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head, smiled, and rose up slowly, and left the room. In a short time she returned. Presently appeared Patty with glasses and sherry. Mrs. Lepell gave him an "arch" look, full of meaning. Lord John laughed.

"Ah! the old sense is coming back, I see. What's this?" he said, with disgust.

But there was no making her understand. His lordship took it good-humouredly.

"Now to business, as you *are* good. Look at this bit of pasteboard. There they go, full swing. (That has warmed me up; must have just one more.) The Countess of St. Ryder 'at home!' That's the cant you know. At her

grandmother's. A fine woman, though when St. Ryder made an ass of himself and married her, solely and wholly I vow because she was a fine woman. No offence, my dear. You know there are people who can't afford such luxuries; and what was well enough in our friend upstairs, and I *will* say *laudable* in the highest degree——"

"Now, Lord John, spare me, won't you?"

"Of course it will be a regular piggery—squeeze you, squeeze me—one of their beastly herring-barrel packings. Dry throats all night, and some wretched thin stuff to cool them with. But I needn't tell you it's all the proper thing, right people in the right place; Ambassadors, Mufti Bey, and the whole gang. The notion sickens me, so it does. So, by your leave, my dear madam, once more——"

"This is quite kind of you, Lord John," she said. "I hope you will make yourself at home and come to see me—now and again, that is; but not too often."

"Now why not, ma'am? Tell me that, please."

"Oh, I am quite serious. You don't know how strangely situated I am, Lord John, and *how careful I must be*. Illness, as you know, makes people strangely sensitive, and it is our duty to bear; 'twill humour such ideas, however unjust or unfounded they may be. No matter, too, what suffering they cause us, or what sacrifices they entail on us."

Lord John shook his head in an amused way. "Go on, my dear; *I* am listening; *I* understand. So I am not to come?"

"I am quite serious," Lord John; only now and again. Things will be said and reported—even the servants; and do you know—you must not be angry, though—they have told that you are such a dreadful and dangerous man to know; they have indeed."

"But you don't believe that, dear," said he, in a wheedling tone. "Come, now, say it doesn't, poor leetle frightened ting, dat can't take care of itself."

She coloured. "Lord John——"

"That is so helpless, de great big naughty

lord will come and eat it *all* up! Upon my word, my dear, you are getting a little tedious, and do you know, I think not so sensible as I thought at first. 'Pon my word, no. Do you know what you remind me of?—that pretty, knowing creature that came out ten years ago with good effect. What was this her name was? God bless me, I hope my memory is not beginning to go. A very pretty creature she was—ah, Charteris—Mrs. Peter Charteris.”

“Thank you, Lord John; a very nice compliment.”

“Wait, though. She was as smart a little fool as ever put on a gown, though she didn't think so. Well, I noticed her at first, and took her up, and thought at one time of 'making her,' as my dear French say—for the husband was as vulgar, a mass of flesh as you ever saw, and I *would* have made the creature, only she took to going on with those ridiculous childish tricks and coquettings—humbuggings, which any fool can see through. It was every minute—'Oh, Lord John, I can't see you here, and I can't see you

there,' and 'my husband this, and my husband that.' Not that I minded it a halfpenny when it went on between her and me; but, egad, when she took to saying all this stuff to other people, and mincing out her nonsense, all the time delighted, you know, egad! ma'am, *c'était autre chose*. I am not *that* sort of fry. I don't care a sou for all the women ever born: but I don't choose to have them talking over me. I soon gave her a lesson. Why, ma'am, I told the whole thing to everybody, right and left, up and down, before her and behind her. I called her the sweet model wife, the domestic virtues, the shepherd and shepherdess, and we all joked Charteris, a bone in whose skin she didn't like, until he got perfectly sick of it. Our fun was forcing them together. It was 'my dear Charteris, let me introduce you to a sweet pretty girl, fresh from the country, dying to know you,' and we'd lead the soft fellow straight up—to his own wife. And at a dinner which a lively young married lady of my acquaintance gave, we contrived a droll mistake, a mistake on purpose, that on going down to dinner the hus-

band had to take the wife. There was no remedy, egad, for they were the last left sitting, so they *had to*, by Jove, —. As the Frenchman says, you know, it's only ridicule that kills; and, egad, we soon had 'em fighting and tearing like cat and dog, and it ended badly, I can tell you, Mrs. Lepell. She rued the day, my dear. Fact is, I am not a man to be played tricks with. There — after that long speeching, I am entitled to another—eh? Fairly, I think."

As his lordship told this little narrative, he seemed to gloat over the punishment, and for the moment a very fiendish expression came into his eyes. It was not unnatural that Mrs. Lepell should be alarmed by the change in one she had always taken to be merely a gay, light man of the world, with no harm in him. She remained silent.

Lord John looked at her sideways as he sipped his brandy, and smiled to himself, with great satisfaction.

"What! ruminating, my dear," he said, gaily.

“Come, look up a bit; life is made for enjoyment. Now, I’ll tell what has been turning over in my head—a little plan for you. Here you are, come to town. As you say yourself, in a very painful position, and having to suffer a great deal. I feel for you; I do indeed, and should like to see you amuse yourself, have something to take off your thoughts. Hang it, it is not to be expected that a lady in all the freshness of her charms; bright as the—what’s his name—should be turned into a day nurse, or a night nurse. It would be a shame, an infernal shame, and I won’t stand by to see it. And if you behave properly, soberly, and decently,” added his lordship, waggishly, “I’ll be glad to do my poor little all to amuse you and divert your mind.”

“Oh how kind, Lord John,” said she, gratefully.

“Not at all. Now we’ll make a beginning with this party at St. Ryder’s. It will show you a little of the world. I’d like to see you take your place—which you never will do with our sick

friend up there—and shine in society, ma'am. And observe, *I* won't do this. I know my catechism of proprieties by this time. It don't do to have a virtuous young creature brought out under the wing of a depraved fellow like me. No, no ; I'll get the women to do it. St. Ryder, between you and me, a poor weak thing, with no character (I mean *of course* in a metaphysical way), I'd like to see *her* refuse. She'll introduce you. Now, what d'ye say to me ?”

Mrs. Lepell's eyes sparkled. Here was delicacy and thoughtfulness. The only thing she was thinking of.

“ What *can* I say, Lord John, except that you are kindness itself. How shall I prove my gratitude ?”

“ How shall I prove my fiddlededee ! You must come well got up, though. Make our friend in the hospital look out. Seriously, go to a fashionable woman—with the best cut and all that—and come out flashing, and do credit to our family. I must go now. I declare I don't know why I take such trouble for people, only

to be met with ingratitude, I am sure. I think I must be going to die—and transfigured. Good-bye, my dear. Bless me, how long I have stayed !”

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFERENCE.

IN the fashionable diary and memoranda which filled a column in the fashionable journal, had been for several weeks, this announcement—
“Monday, the Marchioness St. Ryder’s. *The Dansante*, North Audley Street.”

They were well-known and fashionable people, who gave their two dances regularly every season, and went through the work in a cold, stately, and reluctant way, as if it were a painful duty, and a mere homage to their rank. They took their pleasure sadly, like true persons of condition. There were daughters, the Ladies Raby, and a son, Lord Gewaine, a hopeful heir; but they were not rich for “lords.” His lordship, the Most Noble Marquess St. Ryder, had spent a vast deal of money, and so had his lordship’s

father, in dicing and horse-racing, and other pastimes no less costly in the end, and the estates were dipped sadly. But on the whole this dipping process affects persons of quality like the St. Ryders very little, and it seems to have all the bracing effect of the process from which the metaphor is taken. The young heir of the house was the only one who seemed to enjoy life; he was quietly adding to the future embarrassments of the family, though at present no inconvenience was felt: and Lord John, his worthy uncle, encouraged him privately and publicly, in a half-earnest, half-jocose fashion, something in this strain:—

“That’s it, my lad; don’t spare the governor! *He didn’t spare you*, nor won’t: nor, for that matter, did his father him. It’s only the low, scurvy rascals out of the street that scrape and spare and save. I like to see a lad launching out.” At the same time it must be mentioned that some years before, his lordship, seeing how matters were likely to go, and finding there was delay and excuses setting in regularly on payment of the interest of his twelve thousand pounds’

“child’s portion,” came to tell them one morning in a pleasant business way that he had been obliged to “put the screw” on, and had instructed his solicitor to see that the money was paid to him in bulk. “My dear fellow,” said the friendly creditor, “I can’t afford compliments ; you know it is life and death to me. I must have my little jaunt to Paris, and my little suppers at Vefour’s, and something to pay for a bottle of champagne for my nice young friends from the theatres. So, egad, it may be paid up, and no excuses.” And, egad, to use Lord John’s own expression, paid up it was, at sad inconvenience to the overburdened St. Ryder family, for whom the family solicitor “made out” the money ; and there was no feud—Lord John saying he was not “ass enough” for *that*—to have the fools of the town going about working their senseless jaws on the St. Ryder scandals—God knows there was enough of them already ! And, further, though Lady St. Ryder spoke bitterly of the infamous behaviour of her brother, who had all but ruined them, Lord John would *not* quarrel, and came and went, and even

invited himself to dinner with the most unfailing good humour or indifference, until they gave up the show of resentment from sheer weariness.

On this principle, too, he had secured those invitations for his favourite female friends, taking up off the table a batch of blank cards, and saying, "You must give me these, my dears. Egad if you don't, I'll go out into the highways and byways."

"Indeed we can do no such thing; we are crowded up enough already."

"Well, one can make no difference; so I'll just walk in about eleven o'clock with little Petipas, that keeps the fruit shop, on my arm. She'll look as well as any of your ladies here; egad she will; and behave, too. By the Lord, you may look out for the pair of us." Enough was known of this relation to be certain that he was quite capable of putting his threat into execution. He was therefore allowed to take what cards he pleased. "And see here, my dear sister," he added, as he put them into his pocket, "of course you'll be civil to 'em—mind that.

I'll keep my eye on you; and these creatures of yours must get them men, and that sort of thing."

It was a busy day for Mrs. Palmer in her little mansion. The widow lady who rented the house was often strangely mystified as to who and what were her lodgers. There was something about the mother that she did not like—a cold business-like hardness—and a demand of her full pound of flesh in all their dealings. But to the daughter, always tender, gentle, and soft to her, she felt herself strangely drawn. They seemed to know few people, and got a letter only now and then, and this was a foreign one; and they had no visitors beyond two gentlemen—that coarse, free and easy lord who came pretty often, and the "fine handsome young man," who was plainly "courting" the young girl, and who seemed latterly so sad and overcome with his troubles. Something, too, was "between" that young couple, for which the old lady had a deep sympathy; and she was grieved to see this suspension of their friendship, especially as she

had noted an air of trouble over Miss Palmer's brilliant cheeks. She would, indeed, have liked to have learned all this, for there was a sort of mystery about her lodgers: but Mrs. Palmer was a lady who was not to be thus approached. She could put on a hard, cold, defiant manner—offensive also, as it was defensive; she knew how to keep people in her place; and besides, paying her rent regularly, was entitled to take such a tone.

One of these afternoons the landlady found Miss Palmer alone; her mother had gone out to make purchases for the great festival. The good woman was struck with her downcast air as she read, and with a soothing manner drew near to her.

“My dear miss,” she said, “I am sorry to see you in this way. But it will all come right, take an old woman's word for it. I have seen plenty of life, and genteel, too, though I *do* let lodgings. And though there may be a cross or two now, it won't be so by-and-bye. That's all in the regular course, as I well know.”

Miss Palmer was a proud girl, and reserved ; she saw in this a bid for confidence.

"I want nothing to come right again," she said. "I am quite content as things are. Indeed, I do not quite follow you ——"

"No matter, my dear, it's all one. But you are going to the party to-night, and as I tell you I have seen more life than you think. I know what can be done, and what has been done, at parties, and, trust an old woman, they are the sure places in all the world for a making up. Before you go three steps into the room you will see him there."

The colour came into the young girl's face : her eyes glittered at the receipt of this confidence.

"What!" she said eagerly, "you know this—he has told you—he has sent you?"

The landlady was grieved at this mistake.

"No, my dear," she said, sadly, "I know nothing ; but I am as sure as if I did know."

The disappointed face made her yet more grieved. The young girl saw her mistake, and

that she had betrayed her heart. Her confusion and trouble joined, quite overcame her, and the landlady saw tears in her eyes, and heard a stamp of impatience from her foot. The defence of pride was broken down and useless, and in a low voice, she said, half to herself—"What am I to do?—if I only knew!"

Two women together—and such a situation—was there not a sure opening for confidence and comfort? Difference of station did not interfere. The landlady in a few minutes knew all—at least something more than she had known before.

"Indeed I do not know what to do. I feel for him, but he thinks I do not; but I have my dignity and pride—why does he mistrust me? Why does he judge me so harshly—so cruelly, so unkindly? He thinks, since he has met with misfortune, that we are turning against him, when, in truth, I never, never felt so towards him as I do now. It is he who has turned against me. Since these troubles he has been so harsh and unkind, and charges me with loving these dreadful parties——"

"My dear Miss Palmer, trust an old woman who has seen a good bit of the world"—our landlady was very partial to this little form of reminiscence—"that is always the way—that must be so. When the world goes against us, we get suspicious and sensitive, especially men. I believe—and that's *my* experience—women get softer and more patient under these things. I don't know how it is accounted for, I am sure."

The good woman was making a very just remark, and was a more acute observer of human nature than she fancied. For while our lords of the creation grow furious as their creation gives them inconvenience, their gentle ladies accept whatever troubles come in their direction, and indeed interpose, as much as their feeble strength will allow, to shield the annoyance from their masters. Both, the philosophers will say, are acting according to their instincts. But this view did not comfort the young girl.

"I care for parties! I thinking of any one but him! Why it is a penance—a misery. The

saddest drudgery. I would give worlds to stay at home."

"Then why not, dear, if you like it, and if *he* likes it?"

"Oh! that is the reason," she said, with a haughty toss of her head, "he suspects and orders and threatens me. If he indeed had confidence, he would see and feel what I would do to show him how much—but no; I *must* go. As he put it in that way, I *must* show him I am free, and at all risks."

The old lady grew much interested in the account of this bit of true love. It brought back to her something akin that had happened—well ever so long ago now.

"I don't know," she said, gravely, "but that you are right, my dear miss. It don't do exactly giving way to the gentlemen, nor are they the better pleased that you do so. To-morrow he might be in a bit better humour. Ah! I could tell you about that." And indeed what prompted this advice, was a certain recollection very sweet to think of in these old days, of a passage where

a gentleman had been concerned, and in which the same tactics had been attended with success. Not final, it may be said, sadly ; for the landlady was still a maiden.

The young girl was interested and encouraged. "There," she said, "there is the woman come with my things. Let her come up here to me."

That evening dressing set in about four o'clock. The occasion was one of unusual splendour. The preparations were not complete until past eleven. Their hairdresser and milliners were gone. This room was left an elegant wreck. The good landlady and her waiting-women were absorbed, and shared heart and soul in the glory of the night, shared also bodily ; for they stood out in hall and on stairs to see their ladies go down. A female friend was admitted to this private view, and hung back under cover of the shadow. The passers-by stopped idly to see the "splendid girl" pass, "flashing" as she swept by them.

But among these was a figure wrapped in a great coat, who waited on some steps at the other

side of the street—waited impatiently for three-quarters of an hour and more. The carriage was no evidence that all was finally concluded. “No,” he said, as he paced up and down impatiently, “I will not believe it. She is not like the rest—cold and heartless. She knows how much depends on this night, and she will not make it an open defiance. She loves me in her heart. I know she does—and yet—” He was thinking how unlikely it would be that she would go so far as to help him in the brusque, generous, and noble way, he had had experience of that day. “A bit of true, *true* nature *that*,” he said enthusiastically, “and worth all the conventional pride of the genteel. There are people,” he thought bitterly, “who would have died sooner than have made so ungenteel an offer.” These were his meditations—on the dark side of the street.

Suddenly the hall door opposite opened. There was a glow of light. His heart beat. This was nothing, for here was Mrs. Palmer coming out. She might be going alone, and was

quite independent enough of her daughter to go out alone. There was a long delay. *She* was true, after all. Ah! of a sudden down goes hope, suspense, confidence, love; there she was floating out in the light, careful of her steps, careful of her dress—decked out, brilliant; a monument of decorative industry. It mattered not what she was now! That fatal progress down the steps had ended all for ever.

“I am glad of it,” he said, as he walked away. “I wish everything was settled in this way—yes or no—now or for ever. For life or for death. I like decision of this kind;” and he hurried on to the club, little dreaming that another matter was to be settled that night—or morning rather—in the same clear and decisive way.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ST. RYDERS "AT HOME."

OUTSIDE the St. Ryders, who lived in an admirable quarter in one of the small streets off Park Lane, was a din and racket, a rumbling of wheels—a clatter of horses' feet pulled up suddenly—an angry flapping of steps let down with the almost contemptuous violence, which the gentlemen who stand behind affect—a swinging of heavy chariots as "lovely burdens" shake and rustle themselves into shape—a flashing and rocking of fiery lamps as the huge argosies "pay off" into the night—a shouting for others to beat up—and a stoppage of passengers and humble wayfarers, with burdens on their backs, to whom the recurring glimpses through the open door of halls, basking in light, and of spiritualised footmen whose powder seemed a "glory," and whose

wings were folded up under their livery—seemed a vision like a dream or a snatch out of a pantomime seen from the gallery. Standing together, rising out of the darkness in their long white coats, like gentlemen of a guard, these noble attendants were heard asking their friends, if it was "a 'eavy night at St. Ryders?" Inside, it certainly was "heavy," and in this popular sense, these *elegans* had used the right word. The stair was packed close with an ascending and descending stream. Every one was hurrying in; every one was hurrying away. Every one was squeezing up with sweet smiles of welcome and delight at having got there—the matron leading, as "cutwater"—to use the sea term—of her party, and throwing off the waves right and left. A smile with a caoutchouc property, distending as an object showed itself, contracting mechanically into sadness. The smiles behind were all buoyancy and childish rapture, sisterly affection, that needed arch whispers and sly jests to expand, but which had the strange quality of the same material of instantly

shrinking back—into serious ; a procession whose elements were all of this pattern, was carelessly passing up and down. Dramatic action, mental or physical, is the secret of enjoyment ; and in such a passage there must be endless variety and fluctuation of surprise, joy, and disappointment. There is the pride of difficulties overcome, of sudden extrication, when all hope seemed fled, and the happy fruition and final beatific vision at the top of the stairs. It is only on such grounds that our packed parties—"squashes," as they have been called even by charming lips—are endured for an hour. All find their account in it.

The Countess of St. Ryder, who was "at home" that night, poor soul ! quite answered Lord John's description, as she stood there, a faded, timid lady of quality, who had no interest in anything that went on. It was nothing that "she could not say *bo* to a goose," as Lord John told her often to her face—a test that decided little one way or the other. But she could not say *no* to her husband, sons, or daughters ; or indeed to any resolute acquaintance. There she

stood at the top of the stair receiving the cast-away guests as they struggled out of the billows, and set foot on dry land. It was as good as a farce, Lord John said, ("just stay here, my boy, and watch!") to watch the pettish sour faces, when a hand had set free the dress that was half torn off, *forcing* the vixenish springs into the charming conventional smile of welcome.

"Look at old Tow Row coming up. See, see! She'd just hit him over the eye. 'So sorry, ma'am.' Do it again. Oh! I vow this is a great place for human nature." But the Lord, whispering and laughing in high good humour to his friend, "Old Pemberton," suddenly checked himself. "Here we are, I declare," he cried. "Now, sister, look here;" and he stooped down to whisper to the timid lady of the house, "Mind and look out."

The menial broke the news in a low but firm voice—"Mrs. Lepell—*Miss* Lepell!" and in a moment our Jenny, who had begun the ascent some fourteen or fifteen minutes before, emerged with difficulty from the mass. Her colour was

heightened by the struggle, her good eyes glittered with the excitement, and as Lord John's eye fell upon her dress, he saw with satisfaction that she had not neglected his instructions. She wore a very pale gray silk, with a great deal of white lace, and in her hair were those unfailing scarlet flowers whose effect she knew perfectly was so suited to her face. She was nervous—as who would not be?—among these fine people *for the first time*, as she would later have no ridiculous affectation in declaring. “Before I married Mr. Lepell I never went out at all. Our family, though old and good, which is *everything*, could not afford amusement. We were brought up strictly and at home, under *our dear mother's own eyes*.” Which of Mrs. Lepell's acquaintance had not heard her make this little speech—made, too, not without a pardonable emotion?

The friendly face of Lord John was the first to meet her eye.

“I was ready to faint, Lord John, only I *just* looked up, and there I saw such a kind look of encouragement.”

That nobleman went through his office gravely and with great solemnity.

"Lady St. Ryder," he said, "let me introduce Mrs. Lepell. *Miss Lepell.*"

The lady of the house received her graciously, and with a nervous anxiety to be gracious; Mrs. Lepell bent before her as to her Queen. The eye of the noble lord was on them both with a half-amused expression.

"Now," he said, "we're through *that*, thank God! so take my arm, and come with me through the place. Ah, here's a friend to begin with. Pem, my marquess, you know the friend on my arm?"

An elderly gentleman in a rich brown wig and a fiery face was smiling and grinning and mumbling over the fair Jenny.

"So glad," said "Pem;" "quite happy, Mrs. L'pell. Sorry to see you with him, though. Take care of him. Bad boy, bad boy; I know him from that high. Oh, very bad!" And the marquess chattered and laughed.

"Go along, reprobate," said Lord John;

"come ahead, Mrs. Le. I was obliged," he added, in a low voice, "to do that. That old Crutch would have been at our heels the whole night. Keep him off, I warn you. Here, sir," to a fair youth, "would you be kind enough? They're going to fiddle and squeal. Oh mortal Jove! what things these Christians are! Lady Shandradan has the great Squalacci, so *we* must have her! My dear, what do you think of all this, now?"

"It is charming, Lord John—dazzling!"

"So it is," said he. "I dare say you begin to think you have been here always—going out among these people always, like the actor fellow who thought he was the king, and blessed the pit." There was always a turn of this malicious waggery in the noble lord, which was only *his way*. "Where's our child? She's following. You are anxious about her, I know. Don't you love her, the little dear, and wish she never was to be married, eh? See how close she keeps to us—filial instinct. Here, Hamilton—you are doing nothing—let me introduce—Miss Lepell;

Mr. Hamilton. There, now, sit down here, and let us look at the guys. Ask me any questions, my little innocent, and I'll try and answer to the best of my poor knowledge."

There were certainly some present. Almost at once Jenny picked out a stout lady, dressed in a flame-coloured satin, and whose laces and ribbons, and diamonds even, seemed to fall intuitively into the shape of a great straggling round-hand word—V-U-L-G-A-R-I-T-Y.

"One of the 'queries;' eh, my dear?" said Lord John. "Why, the place abounds with them. But what made you light on *her*? Instinct about Papa Raby? Positively, I did not know she had come. *She* is a *widder*—a fine thumping widder—with her own four thousand a year, fat and snug as herself—Mrs. Laxey. They don't know how Laxey made it; it smells of flax, between you and me. But what does that matter? I must go to her—must, really. Not a bad thing for a poor and noble pauper like me—one of *my* women, you know."

Mrs. Lepell looked a little sad, and dropped her eyes, at this revelation.

"Oh that's nonsense!" said he, "we all come to it, you know. Wouldn't she do finely as Lady John? Fill a chair like any of the titled dowagers?"

"I don't know," said she, calmly; "there is something cunning in her eyes. Who is she talking to now? Oh, yes—Lord Pemberton."

"Nonsense! So she is," said Lord John, straining through his glasses. His eyes were none of the best *now*. "Nonsense! Old Crutch, indeed! Just like him. See, she's looking to me. I come, my love; I come, sweet angel," and his lordship rose, and went over hastily.

The St. Ryders—not caring in the least for music, but music being in fashion—had hired the usual opera people. Picini, the robust Italian tenor, from the chief Royal Opera; Paquetbot, the famous French sweet tenor, who had some years led in the soft and ravishing line, but was broken down; Madame Karoly; and

Kremski, the Polish prima: for most of the *Italian* singers were Germans, Hungarians, &c.—all, of course, *à la mode*. There was, besides, a humble harmonium player, of no name, but who made that wonderful instrument discourse with exquisite feeling and expression; and a *small* violin player of the same class, who had tone, feeling, and expression, but who could *not* transform human fingers into cat's claws, or suppose that tearing, scratching, and convulsive clutching and "plucking" was the soul of true playing. All these artistes sat together, on view. The Polish lady—whose look and behaviour were as dashing, wild, and spasmodic as her voice—had been chartered, it was whispered through the room, at *forty guineas* for two songs: twenty apiece, my dear, ten shillings a bar! I do not believe this, neither did Mrs. Lepell, for she saw Lord John talking a great deal to this strange piquant, half-savage creature, whose face had a Calmuck twist, and whose hair was "touzled" in a sort of barbarous fashion. Lord John now and again gave a little bachelor feast to a few ladies

and gentlemen—strange, but lively little meetings—select, even in their unselect way: so it was not very improbable that he could have arranged with his barbaric friend on easier terms.

The official prima donna had sung her songs. Indeed the programme was a good deal spent. But the French tenor was about to chant his sweet ballad, which he sung everywhere at these drawing-room concerts with great pathos and sensibility. He *had* been a “handsome creature,” with a sweet *petit maitre* beauty; but now his hair was thinning like his voice. We read in the programmes—

“Ma Grandmère !” BALLADE.

Parlos et musique de . . . Gustave Necker.

M. PACQUETBOT.”

It was a little story. The soldier who had been picked up an orphan, and nurtured by his *grand-mère*—with a little *refrain* at the end, to sweet and pathetic music:—

" Ah ! que ce jour approcherait
Plus doux que miel,
Quand je dois rejoindre
Ma Grandmère au ciel !
Ma Grandmère ;
Ma Grandmère . . . re !
Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel ! "

The conscription came, and Pacquetbot (for he *really* identified himself with the part) [had to join the army, and leave his *grandmère*. Then the war-cry was heard to inspiring music—" *aux armes !* " But he would come back, and with glory rejoin his poor old *grandmère* ; or at least, if that were denied—(pause, and resolution of chord into key of refrain)—then :

" Ah ! que ce jour approcherait
Plus doux que miel,
Quand je dois rejoindre
Ma Grandmère au ciel !
Ma Grandmère ;
Ma Grandmère . . . re !
Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel ! "

Finally he does come back, but what he had foreboded with so strange a presentiment had all come about. Entering the village, he hears that

his *grandmère* was indeed gone. She was in the churchyard, to which Pacquetbot at once took his way. The man had so identified himself with the part, his voice became agitated, and he had tears in his eyes. What resource was left?—nothing but (in a broken and sobbing voice) to wait for the happy day (and in resolution of the chord, and so get into the refrain for the last time, the accompanists giving “a run” more like a flutter—but on this occasion only whispered, and with bated breath)—

“ Ah ! que ce jour approcherait
Plus doux que miel,
Quand je dois rejoindre
Ma Grandmère au ciel !
Ma Grandmère;
Ma Grandmè . . . re !
Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel ! ”

The last utterance of the word “*grandmère*” faltered, given “*à voix entre-coupé*,” could scarcely be heard. It was a sigh—breathed away until it became inaudible. There was modulated applause.

Young Hamilton, standing in the doorway,

said, contemptuously to his friend Halliday, "I'm sick of that fellow. He has drivelled that thing the whole season. He goes from house to house with it like a street-singer." Yet Paquetbot, as it seemed to Mrs. Lepell, and to better judges than Mrs. Lepell, deserved more credit; for his voice had long since fled, and he had the surpassing art, which foreign artists only possess, of supplying, by mere taste and skill in articulation, the want of voice and even air, putting an agreeable cheat on our ears.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRANGE NEWS.

SUDDENLY Mrs. Lepell, abandoned by her friend, saw, not far away from her, Mrs. Palmer and her daughter. They were sitting by themselves—and apparently knew nobody. Mrs. Palmer, with a discontented air, was looking restlessly round; but Miss Palmer, brilliant as she was, appeared strangely dejected. She was not thinking of the Pacquetbot nor of his “*grandmère*,” but perhaps of what folly there was in a foolish pride, and would have given worlds to be at home once more. Suddenly she caught sight of Mrs. Lepell, whose eyes were on her, watching curiously and with a sort of triumph, and in an instant she had recovered herself, and looking over with a reciprocal haughtiness, seemed again to take interest

in what was going on. Yet a sudden instinct had told her at that moment—a sudden light that was in the other's eyes seemed to proclaim it—that *the* Mrs. Lepell who was looking at her had something to do with her troubles. It came on her like conviction. It was as though a challenge had passed between the two, and Jenny's look seemed to say, "I know wherefore—and I am the reason—he is not here." But Mrs. Lepell was in good spirits this night, and was not one to carry on petty feuds: for in society, she said, they brought with them no end of awkwardness and restraint, to the parties themselves and to others. So she went up to both ladies very graciously, and even humbly. Mrs. Palmer knew not how to receive her, meaning to be cold and distant; but she sat down on a seat beside them. She asked after "our friend, Mr. Severne. You see him every day, I suppose. Indeed he *wants* your sympathy, and *all* our sympathy, now. He was with me only yesterday, and I think we should all be as good and as kind to him as we can be, for he is sensitive now, as the world is

turning against him ; but he told me, I *think*, you were not to be here ? ”

Mrs. Palmer, woman of the world, struck in, across her daughter, who in great confusion could not answer—

“ We have not much to do with Mr. Severne. We do not *profess* to be so *intimate*, nor would he wish *sympathy* to be intruded on him. We are mere acquaintances.”

“ Why, I thought,” said Mrs. Jenny, opening her eyes wide, “ I thought all sorts of things. First, that charming Miss Palmer here—at least I thought, down at Digby (ah ! that was not a happy time for me, though every one else enjoyed themselves !) that you told me——”

“ Never ! ” said Miss Palmer, with trembling lip ; “ you mistake. Mr. Severne and we are mere acquaintances. He has been kind to us, but only as an acquaintance.”

“ Who on earth is this,” said Lord John, who had come up, “ that you are so longing to cut and disclaim ? ”

“ Poor Mr. Severne,” said Jenny. “ (I suppose

I may tell.) I really thought Lord John—and *you* were at Digby, too—that everything had been delightfully settled.”

“Not it,” said he; “Miss P. has too much sense. But I know the reason—Lord John’s behind the scenes, eh? This night will settle somebody’s hash—I name no names—settle it handsomely! And I am glad of it. Infernal, impudent, stuck-up fellow! turning up his nose at our parties—too good for him. Never mind, he’ll be in a nice way, by-and-bye, and glad to turn a mangle like Mantalini. Hush, children; what, in the name of mischief, have they got jingle-jangles in here for? Why, we’re not going to strike up psalms, are we? And that fiddler fellow going to squeak and scrape, is he? Now hush, my dears, for the good music!” Many ladies were infinitely diverted at Lord John’s well-known humour, and looked round with their daughters, to *show* him they were laughing.

It was the harmonium, violin, and violoncello; and the piece was no other than what may be considered the most popular piece of music in

Europe. Go where we will—to the concert in the great city, to the house where together sons and daughters play music—to the Kurhaus on the Rhine, where the jaded gamblers turn in to hear a snatch of soothing music—the “MEDITATION” which Gounod dreamed out of Bach’s famous “PRELUDE” attends us with charming bewitchment and a frequency that never tires.

All credit to the older immortal master for that lump of ore, so rich, so fruitful, so abounding in raw treasures of harmony; no less honour to the modern master, who came, and, like some exquisite and cunning Cellini, worked this rich gold in an exquisite shape. Never was there such a charming union of ripe, old, and unfashionable, and of new and modern masters, of what is rich and fantastic, of wiry keys and sonorous string and rich “orgue,” of science for the learned, of air and tune for the less skilful. Hark to them now commencing; the soft invitation of piano in soothing velvety pattering of notes, accompaniment that is yet no accompaniment, with the song of the violin now stealing

on, in long-drawn notes. It is religious and yet mundane—severe yet romantic—it warms and grows passionate, lifts up its voice with a cry, and ends as it began, falling off into sadness and weariness and resignation, drooping into the original placid companionship of the piano, and seeming to finish finally; when with new auxiliary, rich and gorgeous to the ear, satisfying, it recommences its stately march again. What lavish embroideries! what rich heavy material! We would have it swept before us again and again; recommence and recommence, and never tire.

Looking to its appreciation with Lady St. Ryder's company, it was considered a tedious business enough. Lord John put his lips together to make a contemptuous face, and said to a gentleman friend something that sounded like "Rot." "Think of a reasoning Christian," he said later, "wasting his life squeaking a horse's tail over something out of a cat. And this is the nineteenth century, my friend! I must go and take a little woman, I've got here, down to feed, or she will be clawing me." And the noble lord,

who was in great spirits to-night, bustled into the room again to find Mrs. Lepell. He found a little change in the general disposition. For into the place next to her had settled himself the ancient marquess, who was grinning and "goggling" terribly, tiring his old muscles with what *he* considered animation and vivacity. "Confound his old bones," said Lord John, audibly. "Come down with me, Mrs. L.," he said; "have some of their messes and mixtures below; d'ye hear me?"

"Egad I can't have that, Raby," said the old marquess. "Just asked myself, and been refused. Snubbed, begad. So don't expect she'll take you and leave me—no, no—that can't be."

"Come down," said Lord John, roughly, and putting out his arm, "don't mind *him*."

She was naturally greatly embarrassed. "What am I to do, Lord John?" she said; "the marquess will be offended. I am afraid I *must* stay here."

"Must you indeed?" said Lord John, spitefully. "Dear me. Quite besieged, I suppose."

Poor little soul, worried out of her life—'afraid of setting the gentlemen by the ears—isn't that good? I say, Pem, come with me. I have a whisper for you, my dear boy. Something in your line. A right good thing about little —. I'll tell it you in the supper-room when we're cooling our throats."

The old marquess went irresolutely, casting a look at our Jenny, who thus found herself deserted by both her noble admirers. There was a look of significant malice in Lord John's eyes. The worst was that as she turned round, biting her lips, she saw quite close behind her the stout glowing Lady Digby, and Sir Parker, who had been dining out, and had come in late. Both had seen the whole little scene, and Lady Digby was tossing her great head-dress, which seemed like a hair turban, with haughty enjoyment. Mrs. Lepell's face took the shape of what may be called *suspended* recognition. But a stony gaze met hers. Sir Parker looked away: but he was very close to her, so she could not help saying, "How do you do, Sir Parker?"

The baronet, moving restlessly in his seat, muttered something, as it were to himself, then rose. Strange behaviour. There was a pause in the music; so the ladies and gentlemen about her, idle, disengaged, wondered exceedingly. From the beginning indeed our Jenny had attracted the marked attention of her neighbours. They had not been unmindful of the little scene between her and the two lords. The ladies looked at her with hostility, according to their fatal phrase, as "a person!" They saw how "forward" she was, and how that forwardness had been properly checked. Above all, they saw the "nice" daughter, melancholy, forlorn, hopeless, dressed as for a show and sacrifice, in whose soft sad eyes were thoughts far away—thoughts of wonder and consternation and bewilderment at what her companion was busy with. *She* could understand nothing of the acquaintances, the familiar easy terms with which these gentlemen came to them. She was scared and helpless.

Mrs. Lepell seemed to know what was in the

minds of all about her, and looked from one to the other as if in defiance. Her cheeks looked brilliant; no one came to her. She was abandoned.

"Come away, do come away," whispered the young girl. "Papa will be waiting, and lying awake. Let us leave this dreadful place."

"Presently, presently, dear," said Mrs. Lepell, sweetly; "as soon as we can get away quietly. We *can't* be rude, dear. You are not enjoying yourself. Why, it is for your sake we came, dear." The ladies who thought her "a person" were looking at each other. "Of course, if you *wish* it."

She was still looking for some one. That person was not on the landing. She and her companion went down the stairs timorously—two unprotected ladies it must be recollected. The young girl thought she was going away. They looked into the supper-room—then into the cloak-room—then in the hall. They were stopped by a crowd coming in and going away, with the hall-door wide open—and saw a strange man in a

white coat standing resolutely on the mat, with a letter stretched out to a powdered servant, who was earnestly expostulating with him.

"I can't do it," said the powdered menial. "You must go away. I couldn't do it. I could no more go looking about in the crowd for a person of the name of Palmer, than for Smith or Jones. It's out of the question——"

"I tell yer," said the white coat, "it's of himportance, and I was told to give it, and see that it was given."

Our Mrs. Lepell was standing close by, and heard all this. At the word "Palmer" she started. She was quick at resolution, and in a second put out her hand, took the letter, and looked at it. It was as she supposed; and she knew the writing.

"Quite right," she said softly to the man; "you have done very well. Lucky I met you. Tell Mr. Severne you saw me, and gave it to me."

The man bowed. The young girl behind—a little absent—listened wonderingly. Her mamma tore it open without scruple, and read it. The

young girl said, half mechanically, "What is all this?"

"Only a line from Mr. Selby," said she, carelessly.

At this moment she heard the name "Severne" repeated hastily beside her. A handsome "French officer"-looking young man, well dressed, was going away, and said to his friend, the same who had criticised Pacquetbot's sad song—

"I tell you it's true," he said. "I was coming out of the club, and saw the thing done. Don't tell it, though. Poor devil, it's enough for him."

"And where did they take him to?"

"Usual place—Levy's, in Church Street. I heard that much, though I kept back in the dark. Poor devil. He thinks no one saw it at all. I pity him. He's made an awful mess of it, but may give in now."

Mrs. Lepell understood all in a second. She sat listening to the music, which had begun again, with her clear brow working. Was she

maturing a plan? She *had* it matured in a few seconds, and rose up hastily.

"Come, dear," she said. "We may go now, or *begin* to go."

She got out of the embarrassment of the blocked-up chairs, and made her way to the stair. Almost at the entrance she saw Sir Parker talking stiffly to another gentleman, something in which the words "our office" came very often. The gentleman was asking reverentially about "Digby," and "the improvements I hear you mean." But Sir Parker would sooner have stayed on the subject of the "office," to which he looked back wistfully. He heard a soft voice close beside him and started.

"Sir Parker," it said, "I want to speak to you very particularly, if you could spare me a moment."

"About what, ma'am?" said he, restlessly. "Really I don't understand all this—why do you er-persist in this er-way?"

"It is something very particular," said she, earnestly. "You must give me an audience—

an official interview, as you would do at your office."

This touch softened Sir Parker in spite of himself.

"Well, ma'am," he said, dropping on a sofa, "that is all very well; but such things are settled in the regular way, by appointment, and a regular hour. Now what is this?"

In a moment she was sitting beside him, telling him her story. There was a curious look of mischief in her eyes.

"I know you will not do it for me," she said, as if pleased at the thought. "At least as a favour."

"A favour!" he said. "Oh, we can entertain nothing of—er—that sort."

"Not for a relation?" she said, looking at him steadily, and still enjoying the situation—"for a very near relation—for one whom you have been the cause, the *innocent cause*, of course, of depriving of his chances in life. I mean that poor ill-treated Mr. Severne."

"I think this is very er-wrong indeed," said

he, colouring. He could not get up or leave the place as he wished to do, for there had come a dense crowd in front—wedged up—and impassable. Mrs. Lepell almost smiled at his ludicrous but impotent efforts.

“Surely, Sir Parker, you are a humane gentleman, and I am told a kindly one, that would do all that is proper and correct. Just one second. What if this poor fellow was in sore distress at *this moment*, beset by *duns*—bailiffs, even—surely, for the credit of the *house of Digby*, of *which you are now the head*, you would, out of your abundance——”

“Indeed I would do nothing of the kind—nothing whatsoever of the kind. (Would you stand back a little, sir?) No mistake about it. Discredit indeed? What discredit is there about him to affect me? How, indeed? Worthier fellows have been seized on by bailiffs. As he has made his bed, so he must lie in it.”

“You are not serious, my dear Sir Parker,” she went on with the same almost bantering tone. “Why, look here. Listen to a little

secret I have heard actually since I came into the room, Sir Parker, that such is the case, actually and truly, at this moment. Is it not dreadful, Sir Parker? I was only speaking in parables, just to break it to you. But really there is not a moment now to be lost. Those dreadful beings, whose touch is contamination, have touched him; there is no doubt of it."

"And who does doubt it, ma'am? What is it to me, or a hundred stories like it? I don't care twopence. If I was to be relieving all the dissolute spendthrifts of the country, a nice time I should have of it."

"But your relative—have you no heart, Sir Parker?"

"He's no relative. I repudiate him altogether, wipe him out *in toto*, certainly since this business. There's my lady looking. Really the crush here—and altogether-er, Mrs. Lepell, I must request-er that this will-er altogether cease. As for you, ma'am——"

"Wait a moment, yet, then," said she, in quite an altered tone. "I have not finished yet. I

have something more to tell you. You have not managed cleverly on the whole, Sir Parker. You should have made me a friend from the beginning. An official like you, with eyes, would have conciliated. I might know more than you think. Instead, I have had to put up with a series of insults from you and your lady."

Astonishment struck him speechless. He sat with his hands resting on the sofa, as he had begun to rise, but without rising.

"I know more than you think—plenty—too much; yet I might have given you a chance; I might indeed, now I shall not. It is too late. Bend down close, sir, unless you wish me to tell it aloud to the whole room."

During this startling communication, there were people who noticed the two faces. That of Mrs. Lepell, indignant, flashing, angry, and denouncing; that of the Baronet, pale, confounded, aghast, and shrinking. An old man about town said, "Egad some one should call my Lady Digby, he's getting a dressing here." Sir Parker knew by a sort of instinct what all this

was pointing to. It had often hung before him ; he had often suspected and dreaded and wondered and *searched* too ; quite under a spell of terror. He did as he was bid, and stooped down his head. What she whispered was what he had anticipated.

"I know what you will think," she went on, "and what you will say, that this is a trick, an invention ; wait only till to-morrow morning, and you will, I give you my solemn word—oath, if you like—know that it is true. But if you would purchase any indulgence, you will do what I wish to-night."

He was overwhelmed—helpless. Lady Digby had by this time made her way to him whom in courtesy we might call "her Lord." She was amazed at seeing him rising up to offer his arm to her enemy. She could hardly say, "Where are you going ? What do you mean ?"

"Tell her you'll be back in a moment," whispered his companion. But he could not whisper anything, but looked at his wife stupidly and helplessly. .

The next day the old man about town sent abroad everywhere that "Parker-Digby had broken out. Reg'lar batt'l royle last night at a house, saw it myself, and then—would you believe it, they went down stairs together." It was merely a gentleman seeing a lady to her carriage, and the servants at the door assumed it was Mr. and Mrs. "Chose" going home. But the old man about town was watching as well as his old eyes would help him, and he saw what was to him, "nuts, cakes and all—everything." " 'Gad, sir, she drove away with him ! "

CHAPTER XV.

AN ANGEL VISITOR.

SEVERNE, when he had hurried from the sight that had affected him so much, with hasty strides and compressed lips—vowing, too, that all was over for ever—hardly knew whither he should go. It seemed to him that all was indeed finally determined that night: that life itself had been exhausted, and that there was nothing left in it worth struggling for. Indeed it must be said that for a week or so the fine platitudes on which he used to lecture to his mother (“we must look our difficulties in the face;” “put our shoulder to the wheel,” &c.), had come to lose their spell. The wheel, as it almost always proves, was too large and heavy, or the shoulder too weak. In fact, one day it had begun to flash on him that it was absolutely hopeless to think

of surmounting his difficulties. He was overwhelmed ; his face getting sharp and worn ; he was pettish and fretful. Still he put off, as it were, final conviction. Now all was over. Long was he to recollect this night. He did not know where he was going to, nor care. He kept in the streets, talking a good deal to himself, and repeating the word "ingratitude" with infinite scorn. "But I am glad it has occurred," he said almost as often ; "very glad." He passed a theatre—a sort of cave of light, as it seemed—with every one pouring in. A great screen was reposing against the door, on which were in gigantic red letters—

"THE GREAT LOCK-OUT!!

THE NEW DRAMA.

1st Tableau :

THE HAPPY HOME !

2nd Tableau :

THE TEMPTER !

THE BURNING OF THE FACTORY!!!

Witnessed by nightly thousands, and admitted by the universal Press to be the most stupendous and startling piece of sensation ever put on a real stage !"

Severne read this very often, and smiled grimly as he read. He often quoted it afterwards in his scornful way. "Nightly thousands," he said, "what a comic expression—and 'Ever witnessed on a real stage.' Every stage is real, you know." He went in; but found it was a dreary, dragging thing. The writers, or constructors, had indemnified themselves for their two "sensation" scenes, by long and weary dialogues between very ordinary and uninteresting working men and working women. He sat only a short time, as, he said afterwards, it was filling him with lowness every moment. Had he waited for what had delighted the nightly thousands—namely, the burning of the factory, "it would have driven me to suicide." "Won't you remain, sir?" the astonished box-keeper said, "the fire scene is going to begin." He could have half wished at that moment that they were all stifled in their own sham flames. He passed his club and went in. "I suppose they'll begin their horse play here," he said to himself. "If they do, by — I'll not stand it. They'll find I'm not to be

played tricks with; and if that low giber, Callwell, dares to try anything with me——”

He stalked moodily into the rooms. He roamed about uneasily. A stray “man,” buried in his deep arm-chair, with a newspaper held over his head, looked up at him, and noted his wild eyes. He passed on, snatched up a paper himself, flung it down, then strayed into the smoking-room; and there he saw “Callwell,” the low giber, sitting with friends, enjoying his cigar, and in very high spirits, and surrounded by what Severne would have called “his toadies.”

“Hallo!” called out this gentleman, in delight, and taking his cigar out; “why, here’s our friend Severne. Come in; sit down, my melancholy boy, and have a cigar!—do! I mean, of course, ring, and order yourself one.”

Restraining himself, the other tried to answer calmly. “I am not inclined to smoke,” he said.

“Won’t you sit down, then; let us see you. Why, we’re all pining for you, my dear boy.”

Severne took no notice of this remark, but quite calmly walked over to the fire.

"Our friend's in love, I suspect," said the other, nodding to his friends, and laying himself out for a regular feast of badgering. "She hasn't written, or has gone at another fellow. By the way, Severne, she may be at that party at Lady Roughrider's—what's this her name is?—where Monkhouse and the others went off to. By Jove, Dick, if I saw *my* Seeusan from the bottom of the stairs going in *that* way, and couldn't get up to her to punch the other feller's head, I declare I'd be very exasperated. Make your mind up, my dear boy, they're at it this moment, depend on it, tooth and nail."

This, taken as "raillery," was very poor and contemptible. But Severne heard the "fools chuckling."

"I must *request*, Mr. Callwell," he said, with a trembling voice, "that you will not make free with me or my concerns, I am not in the humour for it; and you have no such acquaintance with me as to warrant it. I warn you now, drop this line, at least towards me."

There was something menacing in Severne's

manner ("Egad the feller looked as mad as a hatter. I saw his wits were upset by his creditors, so I drew off in time, poor devil," said the jester, telling the story later). No one answered him, and Mr. Callwell, rather upset, kept staring at him with his cigar in his hand. Severne stalked from the room, glaring defiance at them all, and looking as though he were saying, "I am ready to quarrel with any one of you—any one!"

He was a little pleased. "I can keep *those* buffoons in order." Alas! he did not know what was waiting for him. It was then that Hamilton and a friend, the two young "swells" who were going on to Lady St. Ryder's party, following him close, saw him go down the steps vacantly, and almost fall into the arms of two rough-coated men. There was something in the cut of the clothes of these men that made the young men pause and watch, and utter a muttered "By Jove!" They saw Severne start back with a sort of cry, and a "How dare you?" Then they saw him give an agonised and hurried glance round

to see if any one was looking. Alas! it had come at last! What many a man had prophesied in jocular way—what many a one had declared pleasantly was the certain end of “pulling the devil by the tail”—but what Severne had never dared to let near him.

“I wish we had thought of turning away,” said Hamilton, who, however, was too proud of the adventure not to tell it everywhere, and tell it minutely, “for the poor fellow’s face looked so hurt when he saw that *we* saw!”

The worst had indeed come. He might cover up his head with his robe decently, and sink down pierced with wounds. This was his last stab. He could have battled against everything except this unclean touch.

Stupified and weary, almost as a matter of form, he wrote as was suggested to him. “You should have some friends somewhere. That’s always the *way*, you know.” Severne thought of Selby and wrote. But Selby was away at merry balls in the country, seeing rustic life. He would not be home for weeks: and if he were,

on principle would not look at a letter until about noon, even "to save the life of a dying creditor." The messenger came back. Severne had forgotten the message, and listened dulled and stupid. Suddenly he asked, vacantly, what he had not thought of doing before, the amount and the name of the creditor. It was for five hundred pounds—a judgment on a bond. He knew now. He was not in the least surprised. Then came the thought of the two men in their ball dresses, Hamilton and Halliday. That idea went into his breast like a dagger, and gave him as sharp a sting of agony. He groaned and hid his face in his hands. "They will spread it everywhere. People will shun me as if I had the plague." He shrank from himself. *She*, his mother, must know it too. It would kill that gentle woman. Long after he thought of this terrible night, and wondered almost that his hair "had not turned grey." But a young man can bear much more than he fancies before that prodigy can be accomplished.

It was past one o'clock when he lifted his face

from his hands to reply to a discontented servant of the place, who half sleepy came to tell him that there were some friends had come to him at last. Severne asked wearily and indifferently who they were, and was told it was a lady and a gentleman. That indeed made him start. His poor mother had heard—but to come to that degraded pest-house—— He started up!

“Where is she?” he cried, a little wildly. “Let her not come in here. This is no place——”

There was the rustle of a dress—a lady fluttered in and came up to him. It was not his mother’s step. He rubbed his eyes. It seemed a dream. Long after, when he thought of this night, it seemed as though some heavenly vision had come down to break through the dark dusty walls, bringing light and happiness. He could almost have sunk before her; the surprise and bewilderment took away his breath. The brightest, kindest eyes beamed on him. Indeed it appeared something supernatural. For she was in her evening dress, her

"low neck," flowers, and jewels. The "servants" stood open-mouthed—though they were accustomed to all sorts of strange visions there.

"I have come at once," she said. "Oh, how I felt for you! It is cruel and miserable. But I came at once to tell you that you are free."

"Free!" he said; "and you—oh, I recollect. It was you who wished to help me before. How kind—how noble! Why, you are some angel! What does it all mean?" He could indeed hardly collect his ideas.

"Sit down," she said. "Listen to me. Dear Mr. Severne, what indeed can you think of me, coming in this way? Only that I *have* an interest in you, which ——"

"Which others," he said, passionately, "have *not*. How shall I ever repay you? I, who have been such a dull insensible fool, as not to have seen before this, or acknowledged, how good you have been to me."

"Oh, you have other friends," she said, hastily, "who would do as much. That brilliant girl whom I left behind ——"

"Yes, at her party; I know. *She* heard. They all heard, of course?" and he waited anxiously for an answer.

Mrs. Lepell looked on the ground.

"What could she do?" she answered. "They are poor, and of course must make their way in the world. But she was the centre of admiration."

"All that accounts for it. All of a piece!"

Again Mrs. Lepell looked down.

"She must have known, for ——"

"They all knew it. I understand," he said.

"Never mind; we have done with the past."

"Yes," said Jenny, almost with inspiration.

"We have done with the past. That is what I have come to tell you. Oh, you know not what good news I bring! 'Oh, Mr. Severne, can you bear it? Oh, *such* good news, and, oh, happy I that bring it!'"

"Why, what is this?" he said, bewildered, "what is coming now? I am prepared for anything to-night."

"Then listen: I can only hurry over it. But I only knew it myself this night; oh, and such

retribution! There is indeed a Providence!" and the generous lady's eyes wandered up to the dirty ceiling of the room. "Digby, the dear place that caused you such suffering—that you thought was lost to you for ever—Digby ——"

"What?" said he, with gleaming eyes, "not mine! Go on—quick!"

"Yes, yours," said she, exulting; "and, I must say it, all through *me*. *That* sweetens the thought. Sir John was true after all, and I *knew* he was; I always said so."

"But the proofs," said Severne; "the *proofs*, dearest Jenny?" (Neither were shocked at this familiarity.)

"A will," she went on, hurrying her words—"another will, made long before, and not destroyed: preserved almost miraculously. I knew it though, and said it. That dreadful night, when I was sitting with him—and I sat *for hours*—and he talked so passionately, I tried all I could to soothe him; for he liked me, *I think*. And when he rose to go to his room, he said almost as much as that he would wait, and had been

a little hasty in destroying his will. He did indeed—before Heaven, he did! And then I was convinced he had gone to write another.”

“Well?” said Severne, breathless; “and——”

“You remember that old book, with which you used to be so merry, and which he used to bring down and talk about—that Bishop’s book, ‘The Short Way;’ and *you* hinted, I *think*, that I rather *affected* to like ——”

“Oh, forgive me, forgive!” he said, hastily, seizing her hand; “but I have so much to ask you to forgive.”

“Ah! we have done with the past, recollect,” she went on. “Now listen to one of the most mysterious chances. *Who will deny there is a Providence after this?* A few days ago, that book was sent to me, done up in paper as a legacy of *Sir John’s regard for me*. I believe, and it is no uncharity to say so, that that was done out of contempt, and to wound me: for, as you know, the book is intrinsically worth but very little indeed—though poor Sir John ——”

"The unmanly fellow," said Severne; "but all is of a piece—his work to-night and all."

Jenny started genuinely. "What, *he* has done this!" Again her eyes went up to heaven. "Who will deny," she said again, "*that there is a Providence?*" That book lay by me for some days. To-night, as I was dressing, I began to think of that poor, good Sir John—for *this* very dress I wore at Digby—and my eyes fell on this book; and I took it up, and turned over the leaves. Some sheets of paper, very old and yellow, fluttered out. It was an old will, made, I suppose, when you were a child—regularly made, signed, sealed—*two witnesses*, as I could see for myself—leaving Digby to his 'dear little boy,' as you were then. I made sure of meeting you at this party, or I should have sent to you without a moment's delay. Here it is, and I cannot tell how supremely happy I am that I should have been the means of bringing such joyful news."

Severne could only murmur, "What can I do? Oh, only show me some way! From this night

make me your slave—*anything* you wish ; Oh ! if *indeed you were free, there would be a way——*”

“ Hush,” said Jenny, looking round ; “ we must not even whisper *that* ! All that is too late. Besides, you never—liked me from the beginning ; but even for the gratitude, I am so—— ”

“ Gratitude ! no,” he said ; “ a thousand times, no ! Never liked you ! I can tell you now, I always did. I always felt myself drawn towards you ; but it was my own wretched vanity that made me struggle against it. I was too proud to let it be seen. I admired your grace, your wit, your surpassing powers of mind. You talk of a Providence. Yes, yes, there is one indeed. It was a providential instinct that sent you to our house. Fool that I was, I could see nothing of these things. You were raised up to be my preserver—my salvation. It would be a poor return to say that my life was henceforward at your service. I could show my love and gratitude in the way I could wish—that is, by making you a sharer in the blessings you have brought to me. But I solemnly declare, as I stand here—

for I see you do not believe me—that if you were free, *that* would be *the least* return I could make, to offer you myself and all that I have!——”

“Oh, what goodness!” said she, with heightened colour. “I understand all this; *we* understand it, though others might not. It makes me oh, so happy to know this! A load has been taken away from my heart. But now that you have told me this, we will let it go into the past, and not think of it again. What is impossible, is impossible! It is enough for me to know that I have your regard; and, indeed,” she added, with falling voice and swimming eyes, “what you have told me has made me *very* happy. I have a friend at least, which I much want.”

“A friend?—a slave!” he said passionately. “One that will be proud to be so—that longs for the opportunity.”

He seemed as if he could have sank down before her. “Hush!” she said, “we must not think of this ever again. I have *my* little trials to go back to—my duties to perform. To-night

will always seem like a sweet, soft dream, which I may dream again now and then ; but when awake ? No, it must all go into the past, and be forgotten."

He was going to answer eagerly, when the door opened softly, and a worn, wistful face looked in.

Severne started back. The other came up to him with an imploring look.

"It was a mistake, indeed it was. I knew nothing of it. The solicitor——"

"Leave this, sir," said Severne, sternly. "Knew nothing of it? What, when I came to you the other day, and I abjectly implored of you——"

"It was not my fault; indeed no," said the other, trying to catch his hand.

"You referred me to your solicitor ; you could do nothing. Now, I refer you to mine. And I shall show you no mercy."

"What!" said Sir Parker, his dried face contracting up until it seemed about to crackle almost, "has this woman been telling you her

idle story? Do you suppose any man in his senses would accept such a transparent trick? It's too good. I've been inquiring and looking about her. *I* have heard some things."

"Let him talk," said Jenny, softly. "I am accustomed to this. It is the regular cry. It is natural he should speak so. But here, *here* is the paper. Show it to him, Mr. Severne; he will know the writing."

"It is false—a forgery!" said Sir Parker frantically; "a clever forgery! What judge or jury will believe you? Turn *me* out, the heir-at-law! I am in possession! And if it is, it is a sham. What is to become of me?" added the unhappy baronet, distractedly, on whom the conviction of truth was growing, after all. "They have made me give up my place. I shall be thrown on the world to starve. But it's an imposture, and I'll prove it so."

In this way the unfortunate gentleman almost raved on, and at last withdrew; then the pair were left together again.

"I can hardly believe," said Severne, "but

that I will not awake in a moment and find all a dream."

"Yes," said she, "it has been a very happy night;" then sighed. "Now I must go home; I know what waits me there, and what will be thought of all this."

He was allowed to go. Sir Parker had tried to arrange the matter—a wild and desperate appeal to compassion. But she had been beforehand. Not more than three-quarters of an hour had gone since she had left the Ryders'. They drove there. There were plenty arriving and going away. The heavy chariots were rocking, and swinging, and "banging." She got in unnoticed. She might be going away or coming; it did not matter. Almost the first she met was the worn and shrunk Sir Parker, who had come back, not daring to desert his "lady," and thinking it perhaps the safest spot to meet her. Mrs. Lepell swept by him. Upstairs she saw her charge, anxiously and wistfully waiting, with almost despair in her face. She tripped up lightly, for the party was thinning fast. She was just in

time. Yet there was a glow and brilliancy in her cheeks, indescribable. No wonder, after such an exciting night.

"Oh," said the young girl, "where have you been? and poor papa, what will become of him?"

"Absurd," said her mamma; "don't talk so childishly. He has been in his bed hours."

Wicked and malicious eyes were glaring at her—Lord John's—fresh and hot from the supper room.

"What prank is this, I beg to know? Nice proper work for a person of your condition."

"Nonsense, Lord John," she said, smiling; she was indeed in spirits. "Will you take us down and get us our things, it is high time for us to go."

"What work this is," said he, a little husky and loud also, "and what cool airs! Egad, I *will* take you down. Take me down! What d'ye mean? Where have you been, I say? D'ye hear me?—I'm serious."

"I am not going to tell you my secrets, Lord John; come, dear."

"But I will have an answer, my good madam," he said, putting himself before her, and taking hold of the banister, "and I've a right. Don't you know how it is you are among these people, or how the deuce you'd get here only for me? I tell you you quite mistake the thing altogether, and your place too. I'm answerable for the people I bring into this house, and that they behave like the other decent ladies here, and not be going with men in cabs through the public streets. I vow it's an insult to my sister and her company, and I resent it."

"Lord John, you quite forget. Let us go down, please."

"Oh, mamma, let us go home."

He relaxed his arm sulkily, and followed them, his wicked eyes glaring maliciously. He came after them into the cloak-room.

"What infernal work it is! What airs! See us down! I *did* see you down. I suppose you think I am a man that you give that sort of thing to—make me a handle to get on by. No woman has tried that game with me that I haven't *settled*

—yes, and made her rue it too. What *work* it is! Infernal!”

Only the servants could hear this extraordinary burst. But they were accustomed to it on his lordship's part, and did not mind. But ladies and gentlemen were coming in now.

She stooped over, and half whispered him—

“You mustn't speak in that way *now*, Lord John. I can't have it. It's not proper or gentlemanly. Another time I should be angry. But *to-night*, Lord John, I am in such spirits.”

“Gentlemanly! Much you know, indeed. Nice work this is. You quite forget, ma'am, who *got* you here;” and a Lady Archer looked round amazed.

Mrs. Lepell said firmly: “Lord John, I am *afraid* you forget yourself sometimes. But we won't fight *to-night*, I am determined. I declare, a friend's face! Mr. Hamilton, will you take us out? And I have something to tell you.”

He sprang to her with alacrity. “I have been searching for you everywhere. What is this I hear?”

She took his arm and went out. Lord John looked after her with malignant eyes, that were rather inflamed by the lamps and sitting up, and perhaps by something in the supper-room.

But this wonderful night was not to end as yet. All the way home in the carriage, the young girl, strangely excited, poured out a half frantic stream of reproaches.

"You will kill him—my poor papa. He is ill, too, and excited. What does all this mean? Why do you do this, or are you doing it on purpose? I am sure there is some plan in this, and I cannot see my poor, poor ruined father destroyed in this way before my eyes."

It was dark in the carriage, so the two could not see each other's faces. Mrs. Lepell made no reply. They got home. There were lights in the windows. At the top of the stairs, the tall thin figure was standing, looking out with eyes strained, and a curiously wild look.

"You've come back at last," he said.

His daughter ran to him.

"You should not be up, dearest," she said.

"This is folly and madness, and——"

"And death, you should say. I wish to heaven it was, only that it would be the most welcome thing for some who are wishing and longing for it; but I shall disappoint them."

The candle was shaking in his hand, and he was trembling from head to foot. It was a dramatic scene: time, gone two; the street and house silent with the silence of advanced night, only the woman-servant, Patty, listening fearfully in the darkness at the bottom of the stair, as the shrill voice broke out fiercely and denounced the neglectful wife.

"What have I done *now*?" remonstrated the soft voice; "been at a party with your daughter," she said this abstractedly; yet she was wondering could he have heard anything. Yet her head was still so full of the sweet bewilderment of the adventure she had passed through, that she was really inattentive to what was going on now.

"Look, look at her," he went on, denouncing her with trembling fingers; "*she* does not care.

She can wait patiently—bide her time, she thinks.”

“What have we done?” said she again.

“Ah, you think you can impose on me with that soft innocence. I know all you have been about to-night. At a party! Driving about the town, visiting strange houses. Is *that* proper?”

She started, but repeated, “What have I been doing?”

“I know, and I *shall* know more. I have friends left who will protect and aid me and watch for me, helpless as I am; God help me! But what should I expect, or what do I deserve, for I have brought it all on myself, and I cannot suffer too much.”

He hung down his head on his breast. His daughter clung to him close, and tried to fondle him into hope and comfort.

Suddenly he turned; his quick nervous hearing had heard something. She started too. The hall-door bell had rung. The night had been so full of strange incident, that she had an instinct

that all was not done as yet. He saw this in her face as she turned hastily to go down. She heard his voice, querulous and almost frantic, behind her. She was quite indifferent now. Greater things were absorbing her. She said—

“Patty, go down, I’ll open the door myself.” She did so softly, and was disappointed. It was not he whom she had expected. A letter was handed to her, and the messenger went away. She went up to her room, passing the others without a word. She opened it, and knew the writing to be Severne’s; it ran :—]

“Two o’clock.

“At home I found the enclosed telegram. You will see that I have to go away. But I shall be back soon, for I shall never forget what has happened to-night—never! Good-bye—only for a short time.”

“What does this mean?” she thought, with a pang of apprehension. She read the telegram; it ran :—

“MARSEILLES.

“From W. Thomas, Marseilles, to H. Severne, London.

“Come off at once. Mr. Algernon has died of cholera. His wife is ill. My Lord wishes to see you.”

She read this, but could not understand. Who was Mr. Algernon? “My Lord” she understood. Who was “W. Thomas?” She ran to her little shelf, got down her book of heraldry, and read. Ah, now it was all clear, “Algernon” was heir to the Severne title. Algernon’s wife was ill too, and Severne, her hero of that night, *then* came in. How did her eyes sparkle, and she actually fluttered the paper in exultation in the air. It was indeed a wonderful night.

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

BOOK THE THIRD.

DOCTOR CAMERON.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW ALLY.

IN the morning Mr. Lepell was much worse. He had not slept the whole night. Betimes the worn and anxious face of the daughter was seen about the house. She, too, had scarcely slept, but more from a sense of coming evils. When she had seen him she fluttered down.

She was going on an expedition. "I cannot see him die before my eyes," she said. She had on her bonnet and shawl, and was standing in the hall, when the study door opened, and the face of Mrs. Lepell, fresh as the morning, looked out. "Where are you going at this extraordinary hour?" she asked. But the young girl was changed also; she seemed now to be brought to bay, and with panting breath and trembling voice answered her "mamma."

"I am going for Doctor Pinkerton."

"Going for Doctor Pinkerton! not surely against my wish, though *that* is not so much matter, but *your papa's* wishes——"

"He would wish to see him; he is his friend. You must not prevent me. I am not to be stopped."

"Prevent you?" repeated Mrs. Lepell. "No, dear! there shall be no unpleasant violence, or anything of *that* kind; only I wish you to know that into this house—my house—I do not choose that doctor to come."

"I *must* go for him. After last night"—and she stopped.

"After last night. Well, pray go on."

"It is time for me to interfere. Oh! it is cruel—very cruel and wicked of you, when you know he is not to be harassed, when you see him wasting day by day, in a fever, a mortal fever, and these terrible scenes going on——"

"This is quite a new tone," said the mamma, calmly. "So you lecture me. Only please to bear this in mind. You talk of 'scenes.' What

scenes, let me ask you, Miss Lepell, are you going to bring about by the amiable step you are now going to take? What confusion—what anxiety? For I have my own dignity to look to, which no one in this house seems to care for. That man insulted me. You have the whole range of the profession—the cleverest, the most famous,—and yet you insist on this Pinkerton. To what motive am I to put it down to, except one?”

This seemed indeed reasonable. But it only more excited the young girl.

“It is a friend we want. I *must* go. He is the only one——” She flew past her mamma and went out. A shade of trouble came over the other’s face, and she retired into the drawing-room and sat there writing letters: one in answer to the telegram she had got last night.

In a short time arrived the doctor’s carriage, containing the doctor and the young girl. “Very well,” said Mrs. Lepell to herself, and waited to give battle.

“I have not come of myself,” he said; “I

have been sent for. But do not be alarmed; I have been thinking it over, and there is some reason in what Miss Helen has told me. Certainly the profession is open to you; there is plenty of talent and ability in town: I don't want to *force* myself on you—in that department at least."

"Ah," said she, "I thought you would be open to reason."

"But I make conditions," he said. "My friend's brain is in too critical a way to be agitated by scenes of this sort—contentious—besides I have other work. There is a doctor called Cameron, an old pupil of mine, steady as a rock, learned as a pundit, and religious as a saint. It is the luckiest chance *for us*. He arrived only a couple of days ago, and came to call on me. He has just come back from a voyage as a ship's surgeon, and is getting into practice. Such a head, such a purpose as that man has."

"I have never even heard of his name," said Mrs. Lepell. "What of him?"

"Well, have *him*? I name him. I have the same confidence as I would have in myself"—Mrs. Lepell smiled contemptuously—"and on this condition I shall promise not to obtrude my medical services."

"With all my heart, then," she said, "send your Doctor Cameron here."

"We need not go far," he said; "he is below in the carriage."

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "This is very smart and sharp. I hardly understand——"

But the doctor had gone, and in a moment returned with his friend.

The new doctor was very tall, stooped and angular, with a high forehead and sad eyes, a pale, sharply-cut face, and a serious, composed air. He deserved the character given of him: of steady attention and hard study. But his "manner" would be objected to by critics. With patients in danger, "manner" is of small consequence, but for the crowd not very seriously affected, who come and wait in the parlour, and require "attention" and soothing, it is a great

deal. These he did not encourage. This tall, angular, stooped young doctor was besides of an ascetic turn: was said to devote his few spare moments of nights to "addressing" private meetings on religious subjects, had prayers at his house, and was known besides to hold the gloomiest Calvinist convictions. He entered with softness, but bluntly, and stood there waiting till he should be addressed.

"Here, Cameron," said his friend; "let me introduce you to Mrs. Lepell." The other bowed stiffly. His eyes measured her from her head to the very ground. Then, turning away with a sort of grim repulsion, he said, sharply, "Where can I see the patient?" Helen said, eagerly, "I shall show you the way; papa will be so glad."

Mrs. Lepell and Doctor Pinkerton were then left together.

"I congratulate you," he said, ironically. "I have brought a treasure into the house. That man's touch is like a miracle. He can work cures. He has ten times my skill and energy."

He has much less to do, and when he takes up a business that he likes, throws his whole soul, heart, mind, and body into it. He triumphs over disease by sheer violence of will. It was lucky I thought of him."

"You are too modest," said she, smiling. "The best cure for my husband will be perfect rest from *intrusions*—perfect rest from the interference of strangers, or from unpleasant discussions."

"Yet another such a scene as last night would go nigh to killing him. I say nothing about the party, but that expedition to the prison, or whatever they call it—if *he* knew *that*——"

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "What can *you* know of my movements; what *right* have you——"

"Accident, pure accident, I assure you. For instance, I heard of this party, and I knew that it would be a good opportunity to see my friend. Excuse the candour of my telling you so. Then at the club I met a gentleman who told me of Mr. Severne's painful business, and somehow, an instinct told me *his* championship on this day

altogether. You understand. In *fact* I have a turn for finding out my neighbours' doings. So you will be cautious, my dear madam. I put you on your guard; and now that I have my friend on the ground, I warn you about *him*. He is a rough and tough creature, must have his way, and can make a noise."

Again Mrs. Lepell's colour rose. "I suppose he will know how to behave as any proper doctor will do. If not I shall speedily——"

Doctor Pinkerton shook his head. "Hardly, I think. That is one of his peculiarities—adhesiveness.—No. Well, Miss Helen?"

The young girl came in eagerly. "Papa is so pleased with the new doctor, and he seems so clever, and he is so *good* too; and they have begun already to talk seriously, which papa likes."

"There, I told you," said the doctor. "I couldn't do anything of that sort. Now it is time for me to go. Good-bye. I wind up to-day—good-bye."

Mrs. Lepell was left on her sofa in a strange reverie; many times did her foot press the ground

impatiently. She tossed her head now and again, and compressed her lips. It would have been easy to translate all this into spoken language. What right had these men to address *her* in this tone? Would any *other* lady in Brooke Street be so addressed? It was intolerable. But then there was the sort of fair excuse. The sick man who was not to be agitated,—and there was a solace which comes very gratefully to us, even in the midst of trials and annoyances like this. There was a balm beyond; and she thought of the man she had saved last night—the generous man in whom she had so sincere an interest, and who was now well on his road to Marseilles. She thought of her letter, and went over to finish it.

As she was signing her name she heard a step and looked up.

The new doctor was entering, and went over straight to the desk where she was writing.

“Would you allow me,” he said, “—a prescription. I make no excuse for disturbing you. You can finish that later.”

"Oh, certainly," she said, with a rather "hurt" manner. "There is no choice in the matter. That, of course, has the preference."

He looked at her with stern astonishment.

"I should say so—as compared with a trivial letter that can wait any time."

She was so astonished she could hardly answer. "Oh! I *see*," she said with meaning, "you are a friend of Dr. Pinkerton's."

He looked up abstractedly from his writing, but he only looked at her as he was calculating his "scruples" and "grains." He had laid down on the table a little, stout, purple-bound volume, with a flap and black ribbon. She took it up, not knowing, perhaps, how it came there. He suddenly jumped up.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Lepell, but really I cannot. There is private writing in that."

"I had no intention, I assure you," she said, with perfect good humour. "It seemed to me a strange book—so stout and fat—overgrown."

"Hush," he said seriously. "You will excuse me, but *that* is a subject on which there can be no

levity. It is the sacred Word, which by common consent——”

“I did not know it, I assure you. I thought it was a pocket-book.”

“A pocket-book!” he said. “Surely that ONE BOOK of the world—it has a known conformation of its own that cannot be mistaken.”

“Notwithstanding that you please to doubt what I say, I *did* take it for a pocket-book. I could show you up stairs an old pocket-book of my poor mother’s that you could hardly distinguish from it.”

He said nothing, but finished his prescription.

“I can ring, I suppose, to have this sent?”

While they waited he said suddenly, “If I might ask the question, do you read much of that book?”

“Why do you ask?” she said. “You are really approaching Doctor Pinkerton more and more every moment.”

“Why do I ask,” he repeated, gravely. “Do you really and seriously wish for an answer? Is it such an unnatural one to put to a Christian lady?”

Then I shall tell you sincerely why I do ask. Those that live for the world, and are given up to its follies, are not in the habit of doing so. If they attempt it the thistles choke any flowers that may come up. I speak freely, as I am accustomed to speak."

"So it seems," she said, rather amused.

"So it seems," he repeated. "It seems free, no doubt; *that* is what you mean. Well, I have lately come over with two hundred men and women under my charge. There was little to do for their bodies; there were only a few sick; but for their souls God gave me the grace to do a great deal. This may have been free, madam, but it is a freedom you will find in this—what you call a pocket-book."

She seemed awed by his earnestness.

"Oh that is, of course, a very good work indeed."

"A very good work indeed. What praise! You don't think so. I hate that conventional approval of fine people," he added vehemently, "patronising sacred things as it were."

"Sir!" she said, turning round to him.

"Madam," he said, "we are both *His* servants. Where *He* is concerned I cannot mince matters; He before all men and women. I am sorry to offend you, but—Here, will you have this taken to the chemist's?"

Patty had appeared, and went out with alacrity.

The lady of the house was not at all offended with this freedom. It had a sort of piquancy for her, for she saw that "the man was sincere."

"You don't offend me," she said; "I am so accustomed to strange speeches, that it is very hard to do *that*."

Presently re-appeared Patty.

"There's a gentleman below, ma'am, Lord John Raby."

"I can't see him," said Mrs. Lepell, decidedly. "I am not at home."

The doctor rose. "So you know that man?" he said, sternly. "It astonishes me! In charity, I trust that you cannot know his real nature and character. I hope not. I am sure not."

"Hope not, and am sure not," she said, amused. "That means you *are* sure. And that you do hope. Why, you see Lord John everywhere."

"Ah, madam," he said, sadly, "this is the true talk of the world. What *is* it you see *everywhere*, if *that* be an excuse?—vice, folly, wickedness! *You* should not speak so lightly. Forgive me again. You at the head of a house, a wife, a guardian. If you only heard the sad story *I* heard from a poor creature who made the voyage out with me, of that man's wicked and devilish work——"

There was a voice on the stair. "Pooh, fiddle-de-dee, my good child, none of that game!"

"This is shocking," said Mrs. Lepell, agitated. "I daren't see him *after that*. How dare he?"

She stole into the back room, behind the *portière*, and opening the door softly, escaped.

Lord John came bursting in, looking round curiously. "Soho! where is she?" Then he heard the rustle, and darted out on the landing, but she was gone. "Come down, I say," he called

out. "What work and affectation—and deuced bad of its kind. Come down, unless you want me to come up—or——"

A hand was laid on his arm, a cold face was looking into his.

"Nice work," repeated Lord John. "Such tricks. Well, friend, what do *you* want? How did *you* get in? None of this d—d juggling."

"If you wish to know sincerely, I can tell you," the other answered calmly. "There is no need to use that profane language. I am here on business."

"Oh, I see. Physician for the soul. Fit him out light, right, and tight for the long road. Fill *his* flask and wallet, and then—fill your *own*. Eh! my friend?"

"Hush, hush!" said the other. "I do not want to hear you speak in this way. Even in a worldly view it has passed out. We must all go *that* road, recollect—and some of us—those who have spent most of their life—very soon, perhaps, and *then*——"

"G—d d—n your soul," said Lord John, turn-

ing on him in a fury. "What d'ye mean with your snivelling and canting at *me*. Drop it, I tell you, and preach to your own conventicles. So you must come to preach here, must you? Where's your chapel? Ha! ha! Uncommon good. So that's the line she's set up *now*. Oh, I see now. *She* sent for you. Ha! ha!"

"Nothing of the kind. For shame! I am a physician, with very poor skill, which I am not ashamed to try and direct, by aid from One who will help us all if we ask—and I do say, sir, without wishing to offend you, to hear you speak in this way, is shocking. The lady of the house does not wish to see you. She may have her reasons. She has her duties:"

"Oh, listen to him," said Lord John, getting into good humour again. (He told the whole story that very night with some dramatic effect.) "So she's told you *that*. Duties, indeed. Attending her husband, I suppose. I declare she beats anything. You pious ones can swallow anything."

The other coloured.

"I am as worldly in matters of sense as most people," he replied. "I know what Mrs. Lepell is, perfectly—perhaps better than you, though I have known her only a few hours. The common fallacy is this, that it is only the silly and foolish who can honour the Almighty Lord who made us. I know that she is light and foolish, as well, perhaps, as you."

"But you'll convert her, my boy, eh? Bring her in through the little gate? Here, Patty! Patty! How long am I to be kept here? Go up again at once, and tell your mistress that I am here and waiting—Lord John Raby—Go at once, or there'll be a row."

The girl went up again. The doctor then said to him gravely—

"You, too—in a high station—you should show—forgive me, I say, for speaking freely—a better example. What an opening! What an opportunity! Then rank becomes a blessing indeed. It is here that people like us feel our inferiority. *We have no claim. But you, my Lord—*"

"Pi—sh," said his lordship, lightly; "what

are you at? Well, Betty, Kitty, or whatever it is, what does she say?"

"She's very sorry—but she can't come down indeed."

Lord John looked at her for a moment, then burst out, quite loud on the landing—

"Very well, very well! Give her my compliments, and tell her she may be sorry for this yet—all in good time. You going to stay, my reverend friend? Good-bye to you, and good luck to the good work."

"Good-bye to you," said the other, "and good luck to the work too. I say it without the least irreverence, but in all sincerity, I hope heaven will give you grace to think sometimes—if only for a moment!"

"Swaddler!" said Lord John, as he went down stairs. He went home in a rage. "Such airs! Let her take care I don't destroy her and her airs in ten seconds. Thinks she's independent—does she?" Still, notwithstanding this hostile tone, he was sadly discontented and put out; and going off to see his "widow," did not at all ad-

vance his suit with that lady. This sent him away again in a worse humour. He had been hitherto accustomed to have his likings consulted in everything. When he came home he found a letter waiting him. He knew the writing. "Egad, she's struck, ma'am"—(he always addressed an imaginary lady)—"and not a minute too soon!" He read it. It ran:—

"DEAR LORD JOHN,—After what passed last night, I must really ask that you will not come to our house. I don't set up to have *feelings*, as you would say; I have no business to have such an article of luxury. As you know you have indulged yourself in saying things to me, which you would not say, perhaps, to Lady Dumaudier, or any like her, which of course, I had to put up with, *having only a dying husband—bed-ridden*, as I might say—to protect me. But it was very different last night. To assail me in that bitter way, *before my step-daughter!* What respect do you suppose *she* can have for me? What can she report to her father as to the way her mamma is treated by gentlemen

when she goes out to parties ? Before all them strange people too ! It was unkind, ungenerous. I should have said nothing in other circumstances ; but our family is concerned now. Therefore you must not come to our house ; nor can I see you again until some proper reparation is made. I am firm on this. What that reparation is to be I leave to your own sense of manly honour.

“J. L.”

There were expressions of disgust as this letter was read. “Reparation to be ! A five-pound note most likely ! ’Pon my word, this is coming to something. Then if she waits for *that*, she may wait. I’ll make you smart, my young woman ;” and he went off to his club, and there had his revenge with the old lord, whom he found in high spirits.

“I say,” mumbled the latter, “our friend here isn’t quite in the key to-day. But, don’t you know I came on a very fine young woman there last night—one of his young people—and, egad,” almost crowed the old lord, “she wouldn’t go down to

supper with him. Threw him overboard again. Egad, I had my chance."

Lord John looked at him vindictively, but with complacency.

"Listen to him; why he's getting younger every hour! A blooming creature, ain't he? Do you know who she is? May be a milliner's girl from Liverpool, who thought she took in a rich man that *isn't* rich. Consult me, my friend—I know a thing or two—next time. That's a grand business for our young and noble friend there, ain't it?"

In this way he "chaffed" the old lord with a spiteful humour, went away to other places, dined out, growled over the dinner, and was sulky and bearish to the lady he took in.

The young girl, Helen, had been listening over the stairs with a fluttering heart. She heard the lord's angry challenges, and shrank back. When he was finally out of the house she stole down and found the doctor.

"Is that man," he said suddenly, "a friend of the house? Does he come here often? Surely not."

She hung down her head.

"He does, indeed," she answered; "comes here too often. He forced us to go to that place that night. He disturbs papa, who abhors him."

"And your mamma," he said; "does she?"

Helen looked down.

"I am afraid—that is, she is only a woman, and not strong enough."

"But this *should* not be," he said, "and we must take care it *shall* not. Such a wretch as that should not be admitted to any virtuous house. He poisons the air! It cries to heaven, and is an outrage to the Being who looks down on us! It is a scandal, and shall be stopped. And your mother: is she fond of such company? Does she go to parties, and like these vanities that are going on about us? And, if I may ask the question—for I look on myself, Miss Helen, as called on to stand by your poor suffering father—*Is she fond of you?* Is she kind—good? I have a reason for asking. I am your father's friend—a good man and pious, and I would wish to be yours. I can be of use, I know, beyond my poor medical skill. Speak."

She hung down her head. Her slight chest rose and fell. On such encouragement her sympathies were touched.

"Oh, sir," she said, in a burst, "we are very unhappy and very helpless here. There is no one we can look to. She—mamma—does not love papa, at least, she is not kind to him—and, oh, sir, *do not let him die, as I fear he will, if this goes on.* Oh, I am miserable, sir."

She sank down in a flood of tears, as if her heart was breaking. It was indeed the dreadful feeling of desertion and utter helplessness that overcame her.

The doctor was overpowered and softened.

"My poor child, you are not so abandoned as you think. There is One who watches over the helpless, and sends them friends. I feel an inspiration that I am sent to you. It is like a mission. I am strong, not from myself, but from above. And I have met desperate men, ay, and women, too, and baffled them before now!"

And he looked up with devout eyes to heaven, and remained a moment in silence.

"You must tell me," he said, in a low voice, "something—all you know. Where did she come from? How did she come into your family?"

Then the young girl broke out.

"Oh, those happy, happy days! It was too much. Our dear father—he was another father then—until we went abroad to that dreadful place, and there—there—he met her." On this beginning she went on and told the whole of their little history, unconsciously revealing to the doctor little traits and touches of Jenny during that critical time before she became Mrs. Lepell.

When she had done, and he had listened with the most absorbed interest,

"I see the whole," he said, "I might have been present. Alas! it is a very old story. No matter, my dear child; in me you have a friend and protector, and now that I know all and see the whole, *you may depend on me*. From this hour we shall make *him* well; and in other matters, with the assistance of the Great Helper, bring about a change."

"Hush!" said the young girl, alarmed, and fled into the next room.

* * * * *

Mrs. Lepell came down to the drawing-room, blooming, in a brilliant bonnet for walking. The Scotch doctor was walking up and down.

"How patient is heaven," he said, "when it endures such men."

"Yes," said she, "he is rather free and wild, but I was determined to have my way. If he had stayed here until midnight I should not have come down. You see I have spirit, Dr. Cameron. Do you admire it?"

She was really in a glow of excitement, for she had been thinking upstairs how everything was going so well with her *now*. The turn had come.

He did not answer, but turned away abruptly.

"Well," she said, "you think it was *not* spirit?"

"It would be greater spirit yet," he said, bluntly, "not to know such a man at all. I have seen soldiers and rude depraved men of all sorts,

but none with such a cold, hopeless, satanic soul as his."

"Whose? Lord John's? Good gracious! how you frighten one. Do you know, I am afraid you are a little simple and inexperienced, Dr. Cameron?"

He coloured at this and bit his lip.

"I have come in contact with many men—more than perhaps your man of the world—and I tell you plainly, Mrs. Lepell, that man should not be here, and should never have entered; it is Sin—Satan—Death. Indeed I am surprised—with a young, soft, innocent child up-stairs. Why his presence is contagion."

"You talk most strangely," she said, amused. "Such odd ideas. If Lord John heard you. Well, you have seen what I have done. He is not to come here again."

"A fiction," he said, warmly; "a foolish, childish pretence. As if I can be taken in by that! I tell you you are accountable for that child; you *are*. If you do your duty you will write to that man. Tell him he must never cross

your threshold. If he attempts it again, tell him you will call in your friends—police—and have him dragged from the door.”

She burst into genuine laughter.

“This is really droll,” she said. “Where on earth do you get all these ideas? *I am* going to write to him.”

“Ah, I know the strain,” he said; “I know what all this means; this is the world—pretended anger, pretended rebukes, and the like. I tell you, you are sinning; and I tell you, too, in the name of One who sees and knows all our hearts, you are doing what is sinful in exposing a guiltless young soul with the bloom of innocence on it to such contagion. Listen to me. Do, for her sake.”

“I tell you, Dr. Cameron, I am writing now.”

“Will you show me the letter?”

She gave him a cold stare from his feet up to his head.

“You can hardly be serious. Is it not time for you to go up and see my husband—your patient?”

He walked impatiently out of the room.

She looked after him very thoughtfully, with her cheek resting on her hand, then smiled, and wrote the letter to Lord John which has just been given.

END OF VOL. II.



